"From the House of the Rat Catcher" – H. BEDFORD-JONES

MARCH

Weird Tales

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A novelette wherein great, dread beings walk beneath the earth . .

by

AUGUST DERLETH

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Weird Tales

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March, 1944 Cover by John Giunta

LONG NOVELETTE

THE TRAIL OF CTHULHU . . . . . August Derleth 6

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SHORT STORIES

THE UNBELIEVER . . . . . Seabury Quinn 34

He found himself in a land of gray, translucent mists, beyond which lay shining towers and rounded domes

HOOFS . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 47

Her husband was to be there—but not necessarily in human form!

THE SHOES OF JUDGE NICHOLS . . . . . Stanton A. Coblentz 55

How often we say, "I'd like to be in his shoes." Watch out . . . you might get your wish!

FROM THE HOUSE OF THE RAT CATCHER . . . . . H. Bedford-Jones 66

The airborne Yank soldier never expected to find Carthaginian agents, envious nobles and traitor guards—all centuries old

THE PEEPER . . . . . Frank Belknap Long 78

Have you murdered the person you might have been? Take care, there are dire consequences

THE MARMOT . . . . . Allison V. Harding 86

Some unpleasant people get just what they deserve . . . but this was too horrible, too diabolical to be deserved by any human!

REUNION . . . . . Ray Bradbury 92

If you could put together all the things people were, perhaps you could make them live again

TRAGIC MAGIC . . . . . Hannes Bok 98

Witchcraft may be a science—but it's certainly a crude one

VERSE

GHOULS FEEDING . . . . . Damon Knight 33

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS . . . . . Irwin J. Weill 76

THE EYRIE AND WEIRD TALES CLUB 107

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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The Trail of Cthulhu

By AUGUST DERLETH

I

(The controversial Phelan Manuscript, found in the room from which Andrew Phelan so strangely vanished during the night of September 1, 1938, has at last been conditionally released for publication by the Library

A traveler on this strangest of journeys must be on guard against a lurking peril capable of imposing monstrous and unguessable horrors upon the venturesome!

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

of Miskatonic University at Arkham, Massachusetts, which had requested it from the Boston police files. It is reproduced here by express permission of Dr. Llanfer of the library staff, with the exception only of certain deletions whose suggestiveness was too terrible, and whose concepts too alien to contemporary mankind to permit of publication.)

"Man must be prepared to accept notions of the cosmos, and of his own place in the seething vortex of time, whose merest mention is paralyzing. He must, too, be placed on guard against a specific, lurking peril which, though it will never engulf the whole race, may impose monstrous and unguessable horrors upon certain venturesome members of it."—*H. P. Lovecraft.*

IT WOULD not be in error to maintain that my recent experiences were a direct outgrowth of the advertisement in the Personals column of *The Saturday Review,* for the advertisement was unusual and provocative. I saw it first on a day when I was not certain from what

source my next week's board and lodging were coming; it was unpretentious, but there was in it a curious note of challenge which I found it difficult to ignore. I read down the column and came back to it.

"Young man of brawn, brain and limited imagination. If with modicum of secretarial ability, apply to 93 Curwen Street, Arkham, Mass., for information which may be of monetary advantage."

Arkham was only a few hours from Boston—an old city whose clustering gambrel roofs had once concealed hunted witches, whose changelessness lent itself to strange tales of haunts and legends, whose narrow streets along the Miskatonic River were sentient with the very presence of past centuries, of people who had lived there and had been dust for long decades—and it was pleasant to find myself once more within its boundaries early that June evening. I had philosophically packed all such worldly goods as I felt might be necessary to keep me in the position—if I suited the advertiser—until I myself knew that I could fill it to my own satisfaction; and I carried them in one stout suitcase, which I checked at the bus station immediately on my arrival there. After a light repast, I sought out a city directory and ascertained the identity of the inhabitant of 93 Curwen Street, whose name was given as Dr. Laban Shrewsbury.

Acting on the intuitive conviction that Dr. Shrewsbury might be a person of some consequence, I took myself to the reference rooms of Miskatonic University and made inquiry, as a result of which I was directed not only to a local file on him, but also to a book he had written and published two years ago. The file was informative to an exceptional degree; I learned that Dr. Shrewsbury was a student of mysticism, a lecturer in occult sciences, a teacher of philosophy, an authority on myth and religious patterns of ancient peoples. His book, I am ashamed to confess, was far less informative; it was in large part beyond me. It bore the forbidding title of *An Investigation into the Myth-Patterns of Latter-day Primitives with Especial Reference to the R'lyeh Text,* and the merely cursory glances which I was able to give it conveyed nothing whatever to me, save the fact that my prospective employer was engaged upon some kind of research which ought, if not precisely within my sphere, to be at least not uncongenial to me. Armed with this information, I set out for Curwen Street.

The house I sought differed little from other houses on its street; indeed, it had so similar an aspect that it might have been one of a row all designed by the same unimaginative architect and constructed by the same builders. It was large without giving the appearance of largeness; its windows were casement windows, and small; its many gables receded into roofs that seemed to sway and sag; and it was weather stained without having the appearance of being in sore need of paint. Moreover, it was set between gnarled trees, both of an indeterminate age, but seemingly quite ancient, older in fact than the house, which had about it an aura of age that was almost tangible. At this time of the day—the hour was that last hour of dusk, when the deeper twilight invades country lanes and city streets like a kind of just-perceptible smoke—the house had an almost sinister appearance, but this I knew to be the inevitable effect of the ever-changing light.

THERE was no glow from any of the windows, and I stood briefly on the stoop wondering whether I might have chosen an inopportune time to call on my prospective employer. But I had not, for even as I raised my hand to knock, the door swung open, and I found myself facing an

elderly man who wore his hair long and white, but had neither mustache nor beard, thus revealing a firm, almost prognathous chin, half-pursed lips, and a strong Roman nose. His eyes were not visible at all, for he wore dark glasses with shields which prevented one from seeing his eyes even from the side.

"Dr. Shrewsbury?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"My name is Andrew Phelan. I came in answer to your advertisement in *The Saturday Review.*"

"Ah. Come in. You're just in time."

I did not attach any significance to this cryptic statement, other than to assume that he had been expecting someone else—as indeed he had, for so he soon informed me—and wished only to say that I came in good time for an interview, before his expected visitor turned up. I followed him into a dimly-lit hall, so feebly illumined that I had to go cautiously lest I stumble, and presently found myself in the old man's study, a high-ceiled room which contained many books, not only on shelves, but strewn all over on floor, chairs, and the old man's desk. The professor waved me to a chair and himself sat down at his desk. He began immediately to ply me with questions.

Could I read Latin and French? Yes, I could read both languages with some facility. Could I box and did I know jui jitsu? Happily, I had some knowledge of both. He seemed particularly concerned about my imagination, and repeatedly asked curious questions which seemed designed to reveal to him whether I could be easily frightened, never once asking me directly. He explained that he had occasion to pursue his studies in strange, out-of-the-way places, and was often put in some personal danger from roughs and thugs, and for that purpose he required a secretary-companion who would act as a bodyguard should the necessity—admittedly remote—arise. Could I transcribe conversation? I believed I could do so reasonably well. He hoped I was familiar with certain dialects, and seemed gratified when I revealed that I had studied philology at Harvard.

"You may wonder," he said then, "at my insistence about lack of imagination, but my researches and experiments are of so outré a character that a too-imaginative companion might well be able to grasp enough of the fundamentals to suspect the cosmic revelations which might come of my work. Candidly, I must take precautions to prevent anything of that nature from happening."

I had been aware for sometime of something vaguely disquieting about Dr. Shrewsbury; I could not ascertain what it was, nor what basis it had in my awareness. Perhaps it was that I could obtain no glimpse of his eyes; certainly it was disconcerting to be faced by these opaque black glasses which gave no hint of sight; but it did not seem to be that; it seemed rather to be something that was almost psychic and, had I been given to an easy submission to intuition and instinct, I would have withdrawn. For there was something markedly strange here; I needed no imagination to sense it, for there was an aura of fear and awe about the room in which I sat, oddly incongruous with the musty smell of books and old papers, and there was above all an insistent and absurd impression of being in a place apart and away from all other human habitation, like a house of dread in a remote forest, or a place of insecurity in a borderland between darkness and daylight instead of a prosaic old dwelling along one of the river streets in ancient Arkham.

QUITE as if he sensed this incipient doubt lodged in my mind, my prospective employer delivered himself of some reassurance in the disarming way in which he spoke of his work, seeming to ally us

against the predatorily curious world which inevitably imposes upon scholars and savants, and casts over all their work and thought the insidious rust of doubt and disparagement. It was because of this, he said, that he preferred to work with someone like myself, who came to him free of any prejudice and would shortly be protected against prejudice.

"Many of us search in strange places for strange things," he said, "and there are aspects of existence about which even the great of our time have not yet dared to speculate. Einstein and Schrödinger have come close among the scientists; the late writer, Lovecraft, came even closer." He shrugged. "But now, to business."

Forthwith he made me an offer of remuneration so tempting that it would have been folly even to hesitate about its acceptance; and I did not. At once upon my acceptance, he gravely cautioned me to speak to no one of anything that might actually happen or seem to happen in this house—"For things are not always as they seem," he explained enigmatically—and to know no fear within myself, even if no explanation of events was immediately forthcoming.

He would expect me to occupy a room in the house; moreover, he would greatly like to have me begin work at once, as soon as my bag had been got from its place of storage—and this could be sent for—because he wished as much as possible of the conversation with his expected visitor transcribed. The transcription must be made from the adjoining room, or from place of concealment, since it was doubtful if his visitor would speak if he suspected the presence of anyone other than his host, who had had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to come up from the port of Innsmouth and pay him this visit.

Giving me no opportunity to ask questions, but placing at my disposal pencils and paper, and showing me where I must conceal myself—behind an ingeniously contrived peephole at one of the bookcases—the professor took me upstairs to a small, cramped gable room which was to be mine for the duration of my association with him. It was flattering, I vaguely felt, to have been graduated from a mere secretary-companion, to an associate, but I had little time in which to ponder this, for I had hardly returned to the floor below when the professor observed that his visitor must be near. Hardly had he spoken, when the heavy door resounded to the thud of the knocker and the professor, motioning me to my place of concealment, went to open it and admit his nocturnal visitor.

When my employer first mentioned his coming visitor, I had naturally assumed that it would be someone engaged in similar research; therefore I was utterly unprepared for the sight of the professor's guest that I had from my peephole; for he was by no means the kind of individual I would have expected to see in Dr. Shrewsbury's house. He was a man still on the sunny side of middle age, but this fact was not immediately apparent, for he was swarthy of skin, so swarthy, indeed, that I took him for a lascar, and it was not until he began to speak that I identified him as of South American origin. He was clearly a sailor, for his garb was nautical, and it was obvious that this was not his first visit with the professor, though equally clear that it was his first call at the house on Curwen Street.

THERE was a colloquy in tones too low for my hearing, but this was evidently not meant for me, since it was not until the two of them were seated in the professor's study that Dr. Shrewsbury raised his voice to normal volume, and his visitor did likewise. The conversation I then transcribed was as follows:

"I wish you would tell me from the begin-

ning, Senor Fernandez what took place last summer."

(Apparently disregarding this suggestion, the sailor broke into his narrative in a curious but not illiterate mixture of Spanish and English at a point where he must have dropped it earlier.) "It was night, very black. I was separated from the party, and all the time I walk, walk, I do not know where . . ."

"You were somewhere in the vicinity of Machu Picchu, according to your map?"

"*Si.* But I do not know where, and afterward you know, we could not find the place or even the way I took. But then, it rained. There I was walking in the rain, and then I thought I heard music. It was strange music. It was like Indian music. You know, the old Incas lived there, and they had . . ."

"Yes, yes. I know those things. I know about the Incas. I want to know what you saw, Senor Fernandez."

"I walk all the time, I don't know in what directions or anything, but it seemed to me the music was getting louder, and then one time I thought it was just in front of me, but when I walk that way, I come to a bluff. I could feel it was solid stone. I walk around a little way, feeling along it. Then the lightning flashed, and I saw it was a high hill. Then it happened. I don't know how to say it. Suddenly the hill did not seem to be there, or perhaps I was somewhere else, but I swear I had drunk nothing, I was not delirious, I was not ill. I fell down something, and I was in a doorway—it was rocks that had the shape of a doorway, and there was black water down there, and Indians half-dressed, you know the way they used to dress in the old days of the Conquistadores, and there was something in that lake. That was where the music was coming from."

"The lake?"

"*Si,* Senor. From inside the water and from the outside too. There was music of two kinds. One kind was like opium, it was so sweet and intoxicating; the other was by the Indians—it was wild, pipe-music, it was not good to hear."

"Can you describe what you saw in the lake?"

"It was big." (Here he paused, his brow furrowed.) "It was so big I do not know how to say it. It seemed to be as big as a hill, but of course, that cannot be. It was like jelly. All the time it changed its shape. Sometimes it was tall. Sometimes it was squat and fat with tentacles. It made a kind of whistling or gurgling sound. I do not know what the Indians were doing with it."

"Were they worshipping it?"

"*Si, si.* That could be it." (He seemed excited.) "But I do not know what it was."

"Have you ever gone back there?"

"No, I thought I was followed that time. Sometimes I think so still. We looked next day. Somehow I found my way back to the camp in the night, but we could find nothing."

"When you say you thought you were followed, do you know by what?"

"It was by one of the Indians." (He shook his head thoughtfully.) "It was like a shadow. I don't know. Maybe not."

"When you saw those Indians, did you hear anything?"

"*Si,* but I could not understand. It was not in any language I knew, only in part of their own language. But there was one word, perhaps a name . . ."

"Yes? Go on, please."

"*Shooloo.*"

"*Cthulhu!*"

"*Si, si.*" (He nodded vigorously.) "But for the rest—it was just shouting and screaming, I do not know what it was they said."

"And the thing you saw in the lake—was it anything like the Devourer, the war-god of the *Quichuas?* I take it you have seen the Chavin Stone?"

"Our party examined it many times before we went into the Inca country. It is in the National Museum at Lima. We went from there to Abancay, and into the Andes for Cuzco, then into the Cordillera de Vilcanota to Ollantaytambo. Then to Machu Picchu."

"If you examined it, you will have noticed that the diorite slab depicts serpents issuing from various parts of Huitzilopochtli's body. Now in regard to the jelly-like mass you saw in the subterranean lake, did it not also have appendages on its body?"

"Not serpents, Senor."

"But it had appendages? That is the point I wish to make."

"Si!"

"Were you in the vicinity of the fortress of Salapunco when this happened to you?"

"We had gone beyond it. You know how the land is there. The fortress is on the right bank of the river. It is very large, but it is differently constructed from most, since it is built of large trapezoid granite blocks of graded size and a shape that is uniform, all evenly placed and fitted, without use of mortar.

The rampart is almost fifteen feet high, and faces the river. It is below this place, in the terrible and deep gorges of the granite mountains, lived the Quichua-Ayars who built the strange, deserted city of Machu Picchu, which stands on the summit of a rocky promontory in a loop of the river. Almost on all sides of it is the deep canyon. We were then approaching this place when we made the camp that night. Two of us did not want to go, one wished to go to Sacsahuaman instead. But most of us had set out for Machu Picchu."

"About how far in miles were you from Salapunco?"

"Perhaps a mile, two miles. We were in the low country, and the place was very rocky, though trees and bushes grew profusely there."

AT THIS point in the conversation, an extremely curious incident took place which terminated it. Dr. Shrewsbury, his lips half-opened to ask a further question, was suddenly made aware of something beyond my own consciousness; his head gave an imperceptible jerk, as if he had heard something; his lips firmed shut; he got up and said with pressing urgence to his guest that he must leave with the utmost secrecy, and he must take elaborate care not to be seen on his return to Innsmouth; and, so saying, he conducted him posthaste to the rear entrance. Hardly had the door closed behind the sailor before Dr. Shrewsbury was back.

"Mr. Phelan, in a few moments a gentleman will call and ask for Fernandez. When the knocker sounds, answer the door; tell him you have not seen Fernandez, you do not know who he is, you know no one of that name."

I had no time to take issue with such orders; in any case, it was not my place to do so; I yielded to Dr. Shrewsbury's outstretched hand and placed my transcription in it even as the knocker's sound echoed through the house. My employer nodded curtly; I went to the door and opened it.

Never have I felt such extreme and immediate repulsion as I did at sight of the man on the stoop. There was, admittedly, no streetlight for some distance, and the light which flowed from the hall was so dim as to be more confusing than helpful, but I am perpared to swear that not only was there a grotesquely batrachian aspect about the fellow's face—irrationally and yet perhaps not inappropriately, there flashed into mind at once the oddly fascinating depiction by Tenniel of the frog footman of the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*—but that his fingers, where one hand rested upon the iron rail of the stoop, were *webbed*. Moreover, he exuded an almost overpowering odor of the sea—not that smell so commonly associated with coastal areas, but of watery depths. One might have thought that from his oddly wide mouth there would issue sounds as repulsive as his aspect, but on the contrary, he spoke in flawless English, and inquired with almost exaggerated politeness whether a friend of his, one Senor Timoto Fernandez, had called here.

"I have no acquaintance with Senor Fernandez," I answered.

He stood there for a moment, giving me a contemplative stare which, had I been prey to imaginative fear, would most certainly have chilled me; then he nodded, thanked me, bade me goodnight, and

turned to walk away into the foggy darkness.

I returned to the professor's study. Without looking up from the transcription he held in his hands, Dr. Shrewsbury asked me to describe our inquiring caller. I did so, omitting no detail of his attire as I had seen it in the uncertain light, and not forgetting to mention also my curious repulsion at sight of him.

He nodded, smiling grimly. "They are everywhere, those creatures," he said cryptically.

But he offered no explanation of this singular incident. Instead, he went on to suggest a reason for his interest in the account of the sailor Fernandez.

NO DOUBT it occasioned some question in my mind, he said, in regard to his patient delving, but it had long ago seemed apparent that there might well be a connection between certain forms of worship in the great plateaus of unknown central Asia, notably that of Leng, a hidden and secret place, and that of older and more primitive cultures on other continents—some of which doubtless survived in various forms to this day.

"Kimmich, for instance, asks where the Chimu civilization came from if not remote places within what is now China? And the Dravidians who were driven out of parts of India by Aryans and went to Malaysia and Polynesia, later to mix with these same whites, and move eastward as far as Easter Island and Peru, must have brought with them certain strange rites and worship patterns. In short, it has come to me increasingly that there is a fundamental relationship among many ancient cultures and religious beliefs of which we have only a fragmentary knowledge; at the moment, my concern is the possible dual role of the war-god of the Quichua-Ayars, Huitzilopochtli, and that survival of a monstrous, pre-human time, the water-being, Cthulhu, worship of whom seems to have forbidding roots even into the present, so strongly embedded, indeed, among certain sects little known to man, that there is a profoundly intense and consciously malignant determination to keep from the rest of the world any knowledge which might lead to exposure before the time which these devotees of strange cults consider propitious for the coming again of Cthulhu."

He talked in this vein for some time, and most of what he said was beyond me, as perhaps he suspected it might be, though he did not elaborate. However, it was patent to me that his concern for the sailor Fernandez was occasioned by his knowledge of the habits of the cultists, of whom presumably—though Dr. Shrewsbury did not say so—our second caller had been one. Nevertheless, for all his vagueness and the generalities of his monologue, I could not help being conscious of a concept that embodied not only a paralyzing vastness, since the worship of pre-human eras was involved, but also a numbing fright in the incredible horrors and daemonic myth-patterns it suggested. That the professor feared for the life of the sailor Fernandez seemed obvious, though he never said as much directly; yet he told of the London scholar, Follexon, who was drowned inexplicably in the Thames off Limehouse, shortly after he had announced himself as on the trail of important disclosures relative to certain ancient survivals in the East Indies; of the presumably accidental death of the archaeologist, Sir Cheever Vordennes, after the discovery of certain black monoliths in Western Australia; of the curious illness which removed from the terrestrial scene—after the publication of tales purporting to be fiction, and revealing progressively more and more about the Cthulhu-Nyarlathotep-Great Old Ones cults, particularly the hellishly revelatory novel, *At the Mountains of Madness,* hinting at strange terrible survivals in the arctic

wastes—that great modern master of the macabre, H. P. Lovecraft.

But there was one aspect of that singular evening about which Dr. Shrewsbury said nothing, ignoring it as if it did not exist; nor did I myself think of it until after I had made three copies of the transcribed conversation at the professor's direction, and had retired to my room, when it came to me while I lay turning over in my mind the strange events into which I had so blindly plunged. I had had evidence of a certain power possessed by my employer almost at once and had not recognized it; before I had knocked, he had opened the door to me. And again, he had somehow seemed to sense the approach of Fernandez. But even more startling was his curious, inexplicable divination of the approach of the caller who came to inquire about the sailor. How had he become aware of him? Perhaps he had developed a supersensory ability which enabled him to hear sounds such as footsteps beyond the ken of the average mortal. But even so, even if he had heard the footsteps of the oncoming pursuer, *how could he have known his purpose?*

Deeply perplexed, I pondered this puzzle late into the night, only to fall asleep at last with no intimation of its solution, and hazily aware of the incredibly ancient atmosphere of the house in which I had now taken up my abode, an atmosphere that burgeoned with mystery and age, and inescapbly, an aura of dread.

II

UNDOUBTEDLY the first of those strange dreams in the house on Curwen Street was the result of what my employer found in the papers he sent me out to get late in the following day, after I had spent hours with him assimilating material he had previously gathered from all corners of the earth. He had told me that he very seldom left the house; that indeed most of the residents of Arkham were not even aware of his existence, and he said that I would frequently be required to run such little errands for him. Ordinarily he took no paper save *The New York Times;* the mere affairs of the mundane world, even the shaping of events toward another catastrophical war in Europe, were of no moment to him; but on this day he sought a particular piece of information which he was certain might be found in the pages of the *Innsmouth Courier* or the *Newburyport Correspondent,* if not in the local papers.

But it was from the Innsmouth paper that he finally clipped a brief, pointed little article and handed it to me with instructions to file it together with my transcription of the previous night's conversation. The article, which was suggestive and frightened in the light of what the professor had hinted in his final monologue the night before, read:

> The body of a sailor who fell to his death from the docks ruined by Federal agents in the winter of 1928 was recovered this noon in the vicinity of Devil Reef. A native reported the accident early this morning, saying that the sailor seemed to be walking in the company of or just ahead of a companion, who had disappeared, however, when the local resident reached the spot. Stories of a struggle in the water and certain references to webbed hands are generally considered the product of a bottle. The sailor was identified as one Timoto Fernandez, late of the *Chan-Chan,* out of Trujillo.

The implications of this casual article were ominous; yet there was no word from the professor. Clearly he had expected something of the kind; his interest in it did not smack of regret, but only of a kind of casual, philosophic acceptance; he added no comment whatever to it, and his entire attitude forbade any inquiry from me. Yet it had an ultimate effect on him, for after

an hour's study of the conversation transcript, he found among his papers a detailed map of Peru, and before this he sat himself for another hour, carefully scrutinizing the Andean country in the region of the ruins of Machu Picchu, Cuzco, the Salapunco fortress, and the Cordillera de Vilcanota, finally marking off a small area between the fortress and the site of Machu Picchu.

Doubtless it was my observation of this singularly intent and soundless study which was in part responsible for the extraordinary dream of that night—the first of that astonishing sequence—for immediately following his examination of the map, my employer betrayed an odd eccentricity and decreed that we should both retire, though the night was still very young; indeed, dusk had hardly given way to darkness, and from outside still came the muted crying of birds subsiding for the night. Moreover, before I slept, I must partake of a venerable old mead which he himself had brewed, a wonderfully golden liquid, which he kept in a carafe in his desk and served in tiny Belgian liqueur glasses in such small amounts that it seemed futile even to raise it to one's lips—and yet its bouquet and its taste were such as to amply repay any effort made to obtain it, for it outdid even the oldest Chianti and the best Chateau Yquem to such an extent that to mention them in the same breath was to do injustice to the professor's brew. Fiery though it was, it had the additional effect of making me drowsy, with the result that I no longer felt any reluctance to retire to my room and accordingly bade the professor good night and went up the stairs.

I MUST have thrown myself upon my bed fully dressed for that is how I awakened in the morning. However, between darkness and daylight, the extraordinary vividness of the dream that took possession of me was so compelling that when, much later, I feared for my sanity and consulted a psychiatrist in regard to the succession of dreams which this inaugurated, I was able to relate it in the minutest detail, even if it had not been for those shocking and hideously suggestive discoveries I made later.

The data taken down and summarized by Dr. Asenath DeVoto tells as succinctly as possible the essential substance of the dream, and I cannot do better than to copy it into my narrative just as he took it down.

"Case History.

"Andrew Phelan, ae. 28, of white parents, born in Roxbury, Mass.

"Dream I.

"Professor Shrewsbury came to my room, carrying my transcription pad and several pencils. He woke me, gave me what he carried, and said, 'Come.' Then he stepped to the leaded window opening from my room to the south, opened it, and looked out. The night was very black. He turned to me and said, 'Just wait a minute,' as if we were going somewhere. Then he took from his pocket a curiously shaped whistle, which he blew upon. After he had made its strange ululant sound, he shouted into space. He said, *'Iā! Iā! Hastur! Hastur cf'ayak 'vulgtmm, vugtlagln, vulgtmm! Ai! Ai! Hastur!'*

"Then he took me by the hand and stepped up to the sill of the tall narrow window. I followed him, and both of us stepped out into space. I felt something beneath me, and I saw that each of us was riding a monstrous black-winged bat-like creature which traveled with the speed of light. In a very little while we were set down in a country of great mountains. I thought at first it was uninhabited country, but presently it was clear to me that we were in a remote, almost inaccessible region which had been the seat of an ancient civilization, for we were in the vicinity of a building of great granite blocks, trapezoid in shape, with monolithic columns. This rose behind a high rampart, more than twice as tall as we were. But it was not here we were apparently destined to go, for Dr. Shrewsbury turned and led the way down an old road,

past many long abandoned structures which appeared to be portions of pre-legendary buildings, deeper and deeper into the gorges and passes of the valleys lying among the mountains, ultimately leaving the road, and exploring clefts and passages in the rocky cliffs and promontories that jutted forth.

"We seemed to progress with great speed, and it did not seem that either time or space could hinder us. Indeed, there was no time. I was not aware of time passing or of any other physical need. Though it was night, and the stars were in their places: the Southern Cross, great Canopus, and others I recognized; Dr. Shrewsbury seemed to know where he was going, for presently he arrived at the place he sought, and I saw him press his hands and fingers upon a great stone wall, walking along in a place only a little above a torrential river which flowed past beneath, in the depths of the gorge.

"Suddenly a portion of the stone wall tipped open, and we entered. The place into which we walked was a short, narrow passageway, sloping sharply down. Dr. Shrewsbury led the way and I followed; we seemed to float along. The corridor presently opened upon a vast, subterranean cavern, filled with a kind of green light, subaqueous and unnatural, which seemed to emanate from a body of water not far away. It was the place described by the sailor Fernandez. Dr. Shrewsbury went directly to the water's edge, touched it with a finger, and tasted it, seeing which, I was impelled to do likewise, despite the greenish-black muck of the earth at the water's edge —though there was little soil there, only a thin siltish covering over rock. The water was salty.

" 'As I thought,' said Dr. Shrewsbury. 'The lake has subterranean canals leading to the Pacific, and such passages would be certain to give into the Humboldt Currents.' He ordered me to transcribe this fact, and I did so, adding at his direction a detailed description of the cavern, or as much of it as I could see in the pallid light. 'This is the second occurrence of the Humboldt Currents in such a connection, and it is therefore not too much to suppose that at some point in their course the Currents touch upon sunken R'lyeh,' he went on, talking to himself, yet indicating that I was to put down everything he conjectured.

"While I was thus engaged, a native of Indian stock appeared. Seeing him emerge from the farther wall, Dr. Shrewsbury immediately advanced upon him and spoke to him in Spanish, to which the Indian shook his head, and threatened my employer with a small club he carried. But the professor took from another pocket a strange five-pointed star-shaped stone, and held this up before the Indian. This conveyed something to him which made him less suspicious of us, and more amenable. The professor then spoke in another language which I could not understand, and finally in a third, which had a horrible sound akin to the sounds the professor had made before stepping out into space from the windowsill. As he spoke this language, which the Indian understood and evidently respected, my employer translated, and I took down questions and answers in our own language.

" 'Where is the door to Cthulhu?'

"The Indian pointed at the lake. 'There is the door, but it is not the time.'

" 'This is but one of many doors,' the professor went on. 'Do you know another?'

" 'No. This is the one. This is his portal.'

" 'How many are there of us in this place?'

"By thus misrepresenting ourselves as fellow-cultists, the professor induced the Indian to reveal that there were less than two hundred of the worshippers of Cthulhu in the Cordillera de Vilcanota.

"At this moment a faint disturbance in the water of the subterranean lake became noticeable, and instantly the professor's demeanor underwent a significant change. He stood for a moment watching the trembling and shuddering of the water and waited until it began to boil up and churn before he turned once more to the Indian and asked rapidly when the time of the next meeting would be.

" 'Tomorrow night. You are a day too soon.'

"Then Dr. Shrewsbury led the way out of the cavern, turning at the threshold to look back. I did likewise. I saw a horrible thing. I cannot describe it. It was a vast protoplas-

mic mass, which underwent many mutations while it rose out of the water in all its monstrous horror. From it seemed to come a combination of strange unearthly music and a shrill urgent whistling. Then the professor tugged at my sleeve and we went outside of the cavern, where at once Dr. Shrewsbury summoned the strange bat-like creatures which had brought us, and we returned as we had come to the house on Curwen Street."

MANIFESTLY it was not strange that I should have dreamed of the oddly suggestive narrative of the sailor, Fernandez; but there were certain disquieting features of that dream which upset me, and there was an astonishingly realistic and curiously detailed background for that dream. It would be untrue if I said that it did not trouble me; moreover, there were certain puzzling conditions under which it had taken place. For one thing, the intoxicating and soporific effect of Dr. Shrewsbury's mead, causing me to go to sleep immediately; for another, the absolute lack of memory of whether or not I had removed my shoes before throwing myself on the bed—for in the morning, when I woke to bright sunlight streaming into the room, my shoes were gone, and I was forced to wear my bedroom slippers. The professor explained that he had sent my shoes out to be cleaned, and, while I laid this to his eccentricity, yet it seemed exceedingly strange to me that he should have taken the trouble to remove them while I slept.

For the first half of that day he discoursed upon the languages of those obscure evil cults, the pre-human languages of Naacal, Aklo, and Tsatho-yo, and from the dread *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, Dr. Shrewsbury quoted the translation of a couplet which, in the light of subsequent events, assumed a terrible significance:

That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons even death may die.

But it was in the R'lyehian language that he was most interested. There were certain hints in the less obscure passages of the *Necronomicon* as well as in the shuddersome *R'lyeh Text* which seemed to indicate that the awaited time for the resurgence of Cthulhu was growing near; and there were, moreover, certain disturbing anagramatic cross-references in the later oblique Latin prophecies of Nostradamus which told of catastrophic events to come; and there was the additional incidence of evidence in notes the professor had earlier taken and which I had to transcribe, which indicated that there had been within the past decade a startling and ominous revival of ancient cults all over the world.

More than ever I was aware of the undeniable fact that however frank and engaging my employer seemed to be in his discussion of his interests, he took great pains, even without seeming to do so, to prevent me from learning too much. In short, no matter what he said, he spoke either in terms so vague as to be virtually meaningless without the proper information on background, or with such lofty and erudite references that it was frankly impossible to patch together anything even remotely resembling a coherent narrative. At the end of that day I knew no more than I had known after my first conversation with the professor—that he was on the track of certain blasphemous cults of ancient, pre-human eras, whose survival to the present day in out-of-the-way places seemed to fascinate him; the references he made to colossal beings, the Great Old Ones, quotations from such books as the Comte d'Erlette's *Cultes des Ghoules*, the *Pnakotic Manuscript*, the *Libor Ivonie*, and the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt, oblique mention of such beings as Nyarlathotep, Hastur, Lloiger, Cthugha, Azathoth, which, in addition to Cthulhu, had their own bodies of worshipers—all these were impossible

of any coherence. Nor was it possible for me to make anything out of the quotations from the ancient books which the professor put me to transcribing in triplicate, though they were filled with the most *outré* and terrifying implications, and some among them were fixed in my memory even as I became aware of what it was I put down:

Ubbo-Sathla is the source, the unforgotten beginning from whom came those who dared set themselves against the Elder Gods who ruled from Betelgueze, those who warred upon the Elder Gods, the Great Old Ones led by the blind idiot god, Azathoth, and Yog-Sothoth, who is All-in-One and One-in-All, and upon whom are no strictures of time or space, and whose agents are 'Umr At-Tawil and the Ancient Ones, who dream forever of that time when once again they shall rule to whom rightfully belong Earth and the entire universe of which it is a part. . . . Great Cthulhu shall rise from R'lyeh, Hastur the Unspeakable shall return from the dark star which is in the Hyades near Aldebaran, the red eye of the bull, Nyarlathotep shall howl forever in the darkness where he abideth, Shub-Niggurath shall spawn his thousand young, and they shall spawn in turn and shall take dominion over all wood nymphs, satyrs, leprechauns, and the Little People, Lloigor, Zhar, and Ithaqua shall ride the spaces among the stars, and those who serve them, the Tcho-Tcho, shall be ennobled, Cthugha shall encompass his dominion from Fomalhaut, and Tsathoggua shall come from N'kai. . . . They wait by the gate, for the time draws near, the hour is soon at hand, and the Elder Gods sleep, dreaming, and there are those who know the spells put upon the Great Old Ones by the Elder Gods, as there are those who shall learn how to break them, as already they know how to command the servants of those who wait beyond the door from Outside.

In the course of that day, the professor descended to a laboratory on the lowest floor of the building, and busied himself with what appeared to be chemical experiments, leaving me to my own devices upstairs, though in mid-afternoon he came up, carrying my shoes, now cleaned and polished, and instructed me to go to the library of Miskatonic University and transcribe page 177 of the *Necronomicon.*

I WAS glad to leave the house even for what promised to be so brief a task, and I took my departure at once. The indicated page was in the Latin of Olaus Wormius, and was equally as meaningless as earlier references, though, truth to tell, there were now beginning to form in my mind certain dark suspicions which I did not dare face fully, preferring rather to remain completely objective in my approach, as Dr. Shrewsbury had suggested would be the best course for me to follow. The page in question was not long, and it was apparently being copied because of some doubt held by my employer about his own previous copy, which I had had opportunity to see earlier that day.

For within the five-pointed star carven of grey stone from ancient Mnar lies armor against witches and daemons, against the Deep Ones, the Dholes, the Voormis, the Tcho-Tcho, the Abominable Mi-Go, the Shoggoths, the Valusians and all such peoples and beings who serve the Great Old Ones and their Spawn, but it is less potent against the Great Old Ones themselves. He who hath the five-pointed stone shall find himself able to command all beings who creep, swim, crawl, walk, or fly even to the source from which there is no returning.

In the land of Yhe as in great R'lyeh, in Y'ha-nthlei as in Yoth, in Yuggoth as in Zothique, in N'kai as in K'n-yan, in Kadath-in-the-Cold-Waste, as in the Lake of Hali, in Carcosa as in Ib, it shall have power; but even as the stars wane and grow cold, as the suns die, and the spaces between the stars grow more great, so wanes the power of all things —of the five-pointed star-stone as of the spells put upon the Great Old Ones by the benign Elder Gods, and there shall come a

time as once there was a time, and it shall be shown that

> That is not dead which can eternal lie,
> And with strange eons even death may die.

While I was engaged in copying this page, I observed that I was being kept under eye by an aged attendant, who contrived to move ever closer to me. Since the *Necronomicon* was so rare a book—but five copies were known to be in existence—I naturally assumed that the old gentleman was intent upon seeing that no harm came to it, but presently it occurred to me that his interest was rather in me than in the book, and, having finished, I leaned back and afforded him an opportunity to speak to me if he desired to do so.

He took the opportunity with alacrity, and introduced himself as an old resident of Arkham. Was I not the young man who worked for Professor Shrewsbury? I admitted that I was. His eyes shone extraordinarily, and his fingers began to tremble. Clearly, he said, I was not a native, for there were curious stories about the professor.

"Where was he those twenty years?" asked Mr. Peabody. "Did he ever say to you?"

I was mystified. "What twenty years?"

"Ah, you don't even know, eh? Well, I don't wonder he won't say anything. But he was gone, slick and clean as a whistle, just vanished into the wind, you might say, for twenty years. Three years ago he came back, didn't look a day older, and just went on as if nothing had happened. 'Traveling,' he says he was. But it looks mighty queer that a man could disappear from the middle of the street, you might say, and be gone for twenty years, never draw a penny of his money from the bank, and then come back and take up just where he left off as if nothing at all had taken place, not a day older, not a whit different—no sir, that's not natural. If he was traveling, what did he use for money? I worked in the bank that time, I know."

This came out in such a spate of words that it took me a few moments to assimilate it. It was not strange that Professor Shrewsbury should be the object of almost superstitious suspicion among the natives; ancient Arkham with its gambrel roofs and forbidding dormers, with its legends of witches and exorcised devils, was indeed a likely and fertile ground for the growth of doubt and distrust, particularly when such reactions concerned someone who was so manifestly versed in fabled lore as Dr. Shrewsbury.

"He has never mentioned it to me," I said with as much dignity as I could muster.

"No, and he won't. And don't you mention this to him, either. It might be as much as my job's worth, though I don't know that he ever did anything to anybody—just always living so much alone and keeping to himself, like he does."

I did not think it fitting to discuss my employer in this fashion; so politely but firmly I pointed out that there were doubtless entirely logical explanations for what had taken place, ignored his quick retort: "They've all been gone into and not a one fits!" and took my departure. However, I did not immediately leave the building. Impelled by curiosity stimulated by Mr. Peabody's inquiry, I sought the newspaper files of both the Arkham papers, the *Gazette* and the *Advertiser*.

I HAD no difficulty confirming Mr. Peabody's curious story; Professor Shrewsbury had literally disappeared from a country lane west of Arkham, where he had been seen walking but a few moments before one evening in September, twenty-three years ago. No clue had ever been discovered, not in the lane or in his house; his house had been shut up, pending the

appearance of a claimant, and, since none had ever come forward, and the property taxes had been duly paid by Dr. Shrewsbury's legal advisers, it had remained in this state until suddenly one day three years ago, Dr. Shrewsbury walked out of it looking fit as a fiddle, as close-mouthed as a clam about his whereabouts, and resumed his regular way of life, save only that his researches now took a somewhat different line, and his daily existence followed a slightly different pattern. The newspapers had treated the story seriously enough, but had obviously yielded to Dr. Shrewbury's insistence to close the incident as quickly and quietly as possible, for there was a cessation of all accounts and speculations which was as sudden as the incident's beginning.

As curiously as this strange occurrence affected me, yet I could not but feel that it was my employer's privilege to maintain such silence as he thought best to keep. I could not, however, deny to myself that the discovery of this curious fact affected me strangely, perhaps not unpleasantly, and yet not entirely agreeably. It was patent that the situation in which I found myself was bewildering to the extreme. Dr. Shrewsbury apparently had more than one kind of reputation, and, though no one had ever taken occasion to say anything derogatory about him to me, I could sense an undercurrent of distrust and suspicion of him.

When I reached the house on Curwen Street I found the professor once again in his study, carefully handling a package which he was arranging on his desk at the moment of my entrance. As I came into the room he extended a careless hand for the transcript, and almost at the same instant gave me a list of materials he needed, instructing me to obtain them on the next occasion I had to go into the shopping district of Arkham. I glanced at the list of materials, and was astonished to discover that all were well-known chemical ingredients for the making of nitro-glycerine; this, together with the care with which my employer handled the package on his desk, seemed to indicate an even greater scope of interests than I had at first given the professor credit for.

"Yes, this is what I wanted. I did have it right," mused the professor, reading my transcript carefully, and repeating some parts of it aloud, though the effect of his doing so with the black glasses masking his eyes was oddly unnerving. But in a moment he put it down. "Now, then, I'll go to bed early tonight; if you like; you can work here—you have enough to do; or you may go to bed, too. Or, if you should want to go out. . . ."

"No, I've no wish to go out."

"In no circumstances am I to be disturbed until morning."

It was late twilight when we sat down to a frugal meal, and immediately thereafter the professor repaired to his room, taking with him not only the package from his desk, but also the decanter of his golden mead and a glass. I thought it oddly discourteous of him not to offer me another taste of this agreeable liquor, but forebore to say so. But I had little time in which to think of this; for work beckoned me to the study, and there I spent the first half of the night.

IT MUST have been close to midnight when I was aware of the rising storm outside, and heard the banging of a shutter. I had noticed a cloud-bank lowering on the horizon when I returned from the library of Miskatonic University; doubtless it was this bank which had moved across the face of heaven and was now responsible for both wind and rain. The banging shutter, however, beat insistently on my consciousness, and finally I got up to investigate it. It was in any case time for me to retire.

I made the rounds of the ground floor, but there both windows and shutters were shut or fixed firmly down; it must then be on the second floor, and accordingly I went up the stairs, first to my own room, and then to the others, only to reach the conclusion that the shutter was banging at one of the windows in Professor Shrewsbury's bedroom. I hesitated to go in and fix it, but reflected that my doing so would in all probability prevent its waking him; so I turned the knob of his door silently and entered his room, leaving the door slightly ajar, for I did not want to turn on a light. I found my way to the window, which was standing open, so that the wind could blow the rain into the room; I leaned out, adjusted the shutter, and drew back in, lowering the window somewhat, but not entirely closing it. As I turned, my eyes fell across the bed, and I saw that my employer was not in it; I crossed the room and opened the door wider, mystified; the light from the hall streamed to reveal that he had apparently only lain down on the bed; he had not undressed. For some reason unknown to me he had gone out, but I had no sooner come to this conclusion before I was uncomfortably aware that I had heard no sound where I worked in the library, and it seemed a manifest impossibility that the old man should have been able to leave the house without somehow attracting my attention.

While I was pondering this, I saw the decanter of mead and the glass Dr. Shrewsbury had taken with him to his room. I crossed over to it and, examining the glass, saw that my employer had drunk of it. Indeed, there was still a drop or so in the slim glass, and impulsively I lifted it to my lips and allowed the fiery liquid to roll over my tongue and down my throat. Then I left the room, resolutely determined to make no inquiry as to Dr. Shrewsbury's whereabouts, since I had no right to pry into matters that did not concern me.

But my curiosity in regard to my employer's strange absence soon gave way before another even stranger occurrence. I have hinted previously that there was about the old house on Curwen Street an aura almost as of dread; I had hardly got into bed, before I was acutely aware of this, even to the extent of imagining inimical hosts pressing upon the building from all sides, but particularly from that side of the house which faced the fog-bound Miskatonic River; moreover, I was only briefly conscious of this peculiar phenomenon, before I was even more sharply aware of something more, something even stranger. This was nothing less than an auditory illusion in that I heard or seemed to hear strange sounds which could not possibly have had an origin anywhere but within my subconscious; for there was no other rational explanation of the noises I now heard on the borderland of sleep. They began with the sound of footsteps—not steps along the walk outside of the house, nor along the floor or even the ground beneath my window, but steps that scraped and stumbled along what must certainly have been a rocky or stony path, for there were occasionally also the additional small noises of stones or rock fragments rolling and falling, and once or twice the distinct impression as of something striking water. How long these sounds lasted, I have no way of knowing; indeed, I grew so accustomed to them, despite their strangeness, that I lay in a condition of semi-sleep until I was brought bolt upright in bed by a thunderous detonation, followed by other explosive sounds, and the terrible urgence of crashing rocks and shale.

Now there was no possibility of hallucination save that arising from delirium; I was reasonably certain that I was not delirious; in fact, I got out of bed, went to the bathroom and got myself a glass of water. I returned to my bed once more, composed myself again for sleep, and dis-

tinctly heard a whistled ululation followed by a chanting voice saying those same mystic words of my first strange dream in the house: *"Iä! Iä! Hastur cv'ayak 'vulgtmm, vugtlagln, vulgtmm! Ai! Ai! Hastur!"* Then there was a great rushing sound, as of colossal wings, and then silence, complete and absolute, and no further sound impinging upon my consciousness save the normal sounds of the night in Arkham.

To say that I was disturbed is to diminish my reaction to insignificance. I was profoundly troubled, but even in my unnatural drowsiness, I could not help reflecting that on the first occasion of drinking Dr. Shewsbury's mead, I had had so strange and vivid a dream; and now, with just a drop or two of it, I had somehow had my sensory perception heightened beyond every natural plane! This "explanation" occurred to me at first with the utmost conviction, but as I contemplated it, I found myself forced to reject it as scientifically unsound. How close I came at that moment to the incredible truth I did not learn for some weeks, for at the time, I was aware only of the one property I knew the mead to possess—that of making me extremely sleepy, and I drowsed off.

IN THE morning I debated telling the professor of my experience, but ultimately I resolved to say nothing; his insistence on my lack of imagination at our first interview led me to believe that he might go so far as to terminate my employment if he heard such an account from my lips; for the same reason I had told him nothing of my odd dream. Nor did the professor offer any explanation of his unaccountable absence of the previous night. I had been briefly apprehensive lest he still be absent—I knew that the questions he had originally asked me about my ability to defend myself in a physical sense pertained to a possibility that I might have to act as his bodyguard whenever he went out—but he had now returned; he was deep in his studies when I entered the library to find him sitting before a large-scale map pinned up across the bookshelves, a map of all the earth upon which he had placed little red-headed pins here and there. Indeed, at the moment he had just identified a place in South America, when he turned to greet me quite cheerfully despite a rather haggard look.

After breakfast we plunged immediately into the correlation of earlier notes and references made by the professor, as usual, about ancient cults, curious present-day survivals of strange worship, and the like, and I observed that same care and reticence about my employer which I had so readily noticed from the beginning. Our work was leisurely, if obscure to me; there was no sense of pressure at anytime, and I found myself growing very interested in the strange beings which, according to my employer, had been worshiped terrestrially and interplanetarily by pre-human races of creatures. As day followed day, these shadowy great beings and their followers began to take on a subconscious existence just across the borderland from reality, a tenuous, fantastic shaping up in my imagination, though not without certain dark hints of terror and awful dread which came upon me from time to time.

On the third day of this work the professor provided a startling little epilogue to the curious incident of the sailor Fernandez and his story. He was at the moment reading in the *New York Times*, when I saw a smile briefly touch his lips; he reached for a scissors and clipped an item which he handed to me, saying that I might add it to the file on Fernandez and mark the file *Closed*.

The item was of wire service origin, date-lined from Lima, Peru, and read:

A localized earth shock in the Cordillera de Vilcanota last night completely destroyed a rocky hill along the river between the deserted

Inca city of Machu Picchu and the fortress of Salapunco. Senorita Ysola Montez, instructor at the Indian school which is kept in one room of the abandoned fortress reported that the shock came with the force of an explosion, threw her out of bed, and aroused the Indians for many miles around. Despite the evidence of the shattered hill, which apparently collapsed into an underground river or reservoir doubtless stemming from the gorge, seismographs at Lima recorded no disturbance of the earth in the vicinity. Scientists are inclined to regard the incident as evidence only of a local collapse brought about by a weakening of the cavernous understructure of the hill below Salapunco. A number of Indians of the vicinity, whose presence at the scene has been unaccounted for, were killed.

III

IT WAS again a newspaper account which was responsible for the second, and also subsequently, for the last of those strange dreams I had in the house on Curwen Street. So long a time had passed since the previous dream—almost two months, for it was now mid-August—that I had come to look back upon that initial sleep-bound adventure as a remarkable effect of the house itself, the possible result of a change in my way of existence when I removed from Boston. Moreover, within the fortnight immediately past, Dr. Shrewsbury had begun the dictation of his second book, designed to follow *An Investigation into the Myth-Patterns of Latter-day Primitives with Especial Reference to the R'lyeh Text;* he had entitled this second book, *Cthulhu in the Necronomicon,* and for the most part it was utterly incomprehensible to me, being a book written for savants by a savant, but from time to time there occurred strangely stirring passages, which now and then seemed to touch upon my own boundaries of recent experience in a disturbing fashion. He was dictating such paragraphs on the morning of the day which was to end with the second of those remarkable dreams.

"It never seems to occur to the man of even superior intelligence that these incredible myth-patterns have their survival in the present day, and yet it should not seem at all impossible, for it is manifest that their beliefs are centered upon beings which are for the most part co-existent with all time and conterminous with space. Moreover, their extra-dimensional properties allow for much greater latitude than the dimensional laws of our own sciences. By denying this, by implication they deny also that it might be possible to systematically hunt down and close the openings from that borderland; for it has been shown in repeated instances that the Great Old Ones cannot come forth unless they are summoned by those minions who are ever ready to serve them here and on other stars and planets. I refer the skeptical to the occurrence at Devil Reef off Innsmouth and direct their attention to those curiously batrachian survivals one may yet find in isolated places in the vicinity of both Innsmouth and Newburyport, as well as to the thinly disguised fiction of it by the late H. P. Lovecraft. I commend him likewise to the study of certain parallelisms—a comparison between Ithaqua, the Wind-Walker of the ancient myth-patterns, and the Wendigo of the northwoods Indians; between Huitzilopochtli, the War-God of the Quechua-Ayars, and Cthulhu of the mythos—to mention but two which occur to me and to which I have given some little thought. The similarities are almost instantly apparent.

"By this persistent denial of certain evidential aspects which are beyond scientific explanation as we now define science, the doubters make it impossible or well-nigh impossible to utilize the known enmities among the lesser beings of evil who would ultimately once again assume sway over the destiny of the planets, and who are unified

only in their incessant war upon the impregnable Elder Gods who must ultimately awake and renew the spells which bind this evil spawn and which are now weakening as the aeons pass since their initial imprisonment. They would thus thrust aside the possibility of increasing the tension between such followers of Cthulhu as those batrachian Deep Ones, who inhabit the many-column city of Y'ha-nthlei deep in the Atlantic off the blasted port of Innsmouth, as well as sunken R'lyeh, and the bat-winged interplanetary travelers, who are half-man, half-beast, and serve Cthulhu's half-brother, Him Who Is Not To Be Named, Hastur, the Unspeakable; of setting against one another the amorphous spawn who serve the mad, faceless Nyarlathotep and the Black Goat of the Woods, Shub-Niggurath, and the Flame Creatures of Cthugha, among whom there exists eternal rivalry which might well be turned into devastating fury. Let the servants be in turn summoned to the aid of some enlightened brain, so that the openings for Cthulhu may be stopped by the aid of those air-beings serving Hastur and Lloigor; let the minions of Cthugha destroy the hidden places within the earth where Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath and their hideous offspring dwell. Knowledge is power. But knowledge is also madness, and it is not for the weak to take arms against these hellish beings. As Lovecraft wrote, 'Man must be prepared to accept notions of the cosmos, and of his own place in the seething vortex of time, whose merest mention is paralyzing.' "

At this point, Dr. Shrewsbury had completed the first volume of his second book —a book never destined to be finished, though I did not know it then—and he directed me thereupon to complete my transcription in triplicate, proof, and ship the remaining manuscript to the printer, together with a check to cover the cost of production; for no publisher would risk money by bringing out such a book as this, which, though it purported to be factual, had every aspect of the wildest, most incredible fiction, besides which the highly colored romances of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells paled into utter insignificance, for the professor swung boldly away from the terrestrial scene with such conviction that it was impossible to read what he had written without a kind of paralyzing apprehension, and an increased awareness of forces and powers beyond the comprehension of men.

As I turned to the transcription, my employer took up that day's paper, glancing rapidly down each column, and going from page to page. He had got perhaps to the sixth or seventh page when he gave an exclamation half of delight, half of alarm, and reached for the scissors to clip a brief article which he handed to me with instructions to begin a new file. I put it to one side, and only when I had completed my work on the first portion, of *Cthulhu in the Necronomicon* did I turn to it again.

That was in late afternoon, and by that time I had observed in my employer a steadily increasing excitement, as if he were laboring under some inner pressure and could not wait for the time appointed for its relief. The article was brief, and couched in the usual dignified language of the *Times:*

London, August 17: A mystery that might have come from the pages of one of Charles Fort's remarkable books is suggested by the case of Nayland Massie, a dock-worker who had been absent from his home for seven months. Mr. Massie turned up the other day. He was found wandering on the streets and identified by marks he carried. He could not speak a word of English, but speaks a strange, foreign tongue, which no one has as yet been able to identify. His condition is serious. The eminent specialist on unusual diseases, Sir Lenden Petra, who is an accomplished linguist, has been called into consultation. There

is no clue whatever to the place where Mr. Massie might have spent the seven months of his strange absence.

It was an account, in short, of which there were many similar narratives in the files I had taken opportunity to glance over from time to time, at Dr. Shrewsbury's direction, and it seemed incredible that it could stimulate the two dreams which were to come.

FOR that night came the second of that unbelievable trio of dreams. And it was presaged by precisely the same events as the first—by Dr. Shrewsbury's insistence upon our early retirement in order to be ready for more intense work tomorrow, by a drink of his golden mead, and by the quick drowsiness and the dream-haunted sleep that followed. I turn again to the account given to Dr. DeVoto and transcribed by him under the heading of *Dream II.*

"Professor Shrewsbury came to my room, as before, once again carrying pad and pencils which he gave to me after he had awakened me. Everything happened as before. After he had opened the windows and shouted that strange command into space, we stepped out and found ourselves once more astride the huge bat-winged creatures of the first dream. I remember making an examination of them, but apart from the curiously repellent feeling as of human flesh under my hands, and furred wings, I was not able to ascertain what these creatures were like, but it now seemed to me that Professor Shrewsbury *talked* to them.

"Again in a short while we were put down, but this time it was soon apparent that we were in no isolated locality, for lights glowed all around us, and off to our left there were great beacons and a floodlit field. Dr. Shrewsbury seemed to know precisely where we were, and he made for the buildings beyond this floodlit field with as much haste as he could muster. We were not far away, and it was soon evident that we were following a country lane. As we drew near to the floodlit area and the buildings, I began to be aware of a vague familiarity, as if I had been in this place before, not too long ago. Presently I recognized the surroundings; we were at Croydon Aerodrome, which I had visited three years before as an undergraduate. The professor's purpose was soon clear; he had gone there only to get a taxicab, into which he bundled me and then sought a city directory inside the nearest building. When he came out he directed the driver to take us to an address in Park Lane, and to wait there for us.

"We were taken to the Park Lane address and applied for admittance, which we did not gain until my employer took out his card and wrote across it, 'In regard to the case of Nayland Massie.' After this had been taken in, we were permitted to enter, and we were conducted into the presence of an elderly and very dignified man, whom Professor Shrewsbury addressed as Dr. Petra. My employer immediately indicated his interest in the case of the dock-worker Massie, and explained that he had come by air from his home in America to determine whether he might not be able to identify and translate the language which the mysteriously absent dock-worker now spoke.

"Dr. Petra was immediately most helpful. He explained that Massie had been only an illiterate fellow, but that in this language which he now spoke, together with a mixture of occasional Greek and Latin words, he betrayed a high degree of intelligence. In short, though the physical man who had returned from whatever place he had been was the same, the mental man was obviously not similar. Moreover, his physical condition was such that he was not expected to live long, for he had apparently been exposed to rigorous climates, and conditioned to violent climactic changes, but that conditioning was rapidly wearing off and he would not be able to withstand the damage being done to his body in that change. Today's *London Times* had a rather complete summary of the case, if Dr. Shrewsbury would care to have Dr. Petra's copy.

"My employer accepted the paper and gave it to me. I put it into my pocket. My employer then suggested that he would like to

interview the patient, if possible. Sir Lenden Petra ordered his own car out and accompanied us across London to the East India Dock Road, where the dock-worker Massie was being kept, in a kind of coma, but able at times to answer certain questions put to him in Latin or Greek.

"We were admitted by his nurse, and taken at once to the bedside.

"There lay a man in his middle-forties, motionless, his eyes open and clearly antipathetic to the shaded light that glowed from a lamp nearby. At our entrance, though he did not turn his head, he began to make a low murmuring sound, whereupon my employer signalled to me to be ready to take down whatever he translated.

" 'There,' said Dr. Petra, 'that is the language. I observe that it has certain repetitive sounds and constructions suggesting that he is speaking a formal language—but no one in London seems to know what it is, save that it seems very ancient.'

" 'Yes,' replied Dr. Shrewsbury, 'it is R'lyehian!'

"Dr. Petra seemed astonished. 'You know it?'

" 'Yes, it is a pre-human language, still spoken in certain hidden places both terrestrially and extraterrestrially.'

"The sounds that now came from the dock-worker's lips were as follows: *'Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah-nagl fhtagn.'* This Dr. Shrewsbury readily translated as: 'In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.' He then addressed a query to Massie, whereupon the dock-worker turned his head and stared at us. Dr. Petra said that it was the first sign of cognizance he had made.

"The following brief conversation now ensued, Dr. Shrewsbury speaking in the same language as the dock-worker.

" 'Where were you?'

" 'With those who serve Him Who Is to Come.'

" 'Who is he?'

" 'Great Cthulhu. In his house at R'lyeh he is not dead, but only sleeping. He shall come when he is summoned.'

" 'Who will summon him?'

" 'Those who worship him.'

" 'Where is R'lyeh?'

" 'It is in the sea.'

" 'But you were not under water.'

" 'No, I was on the island.'

" 'Ah! What island?'

" 'It was thrown up by the eruption of the ocean floor.'

" 'Is it part of R'lyeh?'

" 'It is part of R'lyeh.'

" 'Where is it?'

" 'In the Pacific Ocean near the East Indies!'

" 'What latitude?'

" 'I think it is S. Latitude 49° 51′, W Longitude 128° 34′. It is off New Zealand, south of the Indies.'

" 'Did you see Him?'

" 'No. But He was there.'

" 'How were you brought there?'

" 'I was taken by something in the water of the Thames one night. They brought me.'

" 'What was it?'

" 'It was like a man, but it was not a man. It could swim in all waters. It had webbed hands, and its face was like a frog's.'

"At this juncture, Massie began to breathe deeply, in exhaustion, and Dr. Petra ended the conversation, apologetically, but Dr. Shrewsbury brushed his apologies away, saying that he had heard enough, and making the same kind of vague explanation to Dr. Petra which he was in the habit of making to me in the house on Curwen Street. My employer was obviously in great haste to get away, and as soon as possible we parted from Dr. Petra, and made our way on foot to a desolate section along the West India Docks, where, now in the darkness of night's depths, Dr. Shrewsbury paused and made his strange ululant whistling and commanded, *'Iā! Iā! Hastur! Hastur cf'ayak 'vulgtmm, vugtlagln, vulgtmm! Ai! Ai! Hastur!'*

"Then immediately our bat-winged steeds came out of the heavens and we returned to the ancient gambrel roofs of witch-cursed Arkham."

More even than the dreams themselves, the hiatus between the second and the third of this unholy trio sent me in the

end to Dr. Asenath DeVoto for a consultation, fearing for my sanity. For, despite the fact that I was manifestly in the house of Dr. Shrewsbury on Aylesbury Street, working with my employer at the preparation of some chemicals, at which he was feverishly engaged for what seemed many hours, the curious and grotesquely disturbing fact about the time between the second and third dreams was this: *there did not seem to be an hiatus at all!* I had lost, it seemed, the power or capacity to distinguish between dream and reality; I no longer knew which was which, for all the events of that inexplicable hiatus, however clear they seemed to me, had the same quality as the dreams.

Were we in that house on Curwen Street preparing those mysterious packages which Dr. Shrewsbury ultimately brought to his desk in the study? Or was I caught in the mesh of a dream so profound that I could not waken to reality? It troubled me then, though it troubles me less now. But at that time, there was present in the house such an air of dire necessity, such a suggestion of terrible peril, such an urgence, that food and drink—save for that strange golden mead and its effect—seemed unnecessary, and the ordinary pursuits of the day were given over to the task before us, veiled as always in that secrecy which the professor maintained in the face of everything.

DR. DEVOTO took all these impressions down, as he did the dreams; he made no comment on them, and circumstances made it impossible for me to see him again; for events took place with terrible swiftness after the occurrence of the third dream. I cannot be sure that that third and final cataclysmic dream took place on that night or on some other night; or even that it did not take place by day, or that it was not in sequence a part of the second dream. All I know is that it began as before, with the arrival of Dr. Shrewsbury in my room, the summoning of the strange winged beasts which carried us, and its beginning differed only in that we were this time burdened with the packages Dr. Shrewsbury had prepared.

The third and last dream, as Dr. DeVoto took it down, was as follows:

"We were put down on a strange, bleak place of utterly alien aspect. The sky was dark, forbidding; it seemed to me that fogs of a strange, unearthly green color, moved eternally about us. From time to time I had chilling glimpses of strange monolithic structures in part ruins, overgrown with seaweed, now drying, hanging limply from the superstructures before us. All around us was the sound of the sea, and the earth underfoot was of a greenish-black muck; it was earth similar to that in the cavern of my first dream.

"The professor made his way cautiously forward until we came to a portal, before which lay many lesser stones, from among which the professor picked up a curious stone in the shape of a five-pointed star and gave it to me, saying: 'The earthquake evidently broke away the encrustation of these talismen put there by the Elder Gods when Cthulhu was imprisoned. This is one of the doorways to the Outside.'

"He took one of the packages and unwrapped it, and I saw that it contained explosives of singular potency. These he directed me to place strategically around the portal. Despite my awe of my surroundings, I did so. For the surroundings, whenever the mists cleared a little, were such as to leave a man breathless with wonder. The ruins which still stood partially here and there, untouched by the quake which had caused this island to rise up from the depths, were of buildings of such vast angles and such colossal stone surfaces, and were moreover marked with such horrific hieroglyphs and impious images that I was overcome with the most intense feeling of dread. The angles and planes of this portion of the great sunken city were non-Euclidean, loathesomely suggestive of the spheres and dimensions of

which Professor Shrewsbury had been writing only a little while ago, of dimensions hideously apart from our own.

"The portal at which we worked framed a great carven door, which stood partly open, but not yet so far that it could permit entry. I do not know precisely when that door began to open imperceptibly wider, but it was the professor who first noticed the *things* which were slithering over the monolithic rocks toward us from out of the sea beyond us. He had set up the apparatus necessary for the detonation which he meant to set off, and casually pointed out the scaly creatures with their webbed hands and feet, and their half-human, half-batrachian features, cautioning me not to be afraid, for the five-pointed stone he had given me would protect me from them, if not from 'Him down there.'

"At this moment he noticed that the door seemed to stand a little wider. 'Was that door so far open at first?' he asked agitatedly.

"I said I did not think so."

" 'Then, in Heaven's name, come away!'

"Even before I stepped back, I was conscious of two things impinging upon my senses—a charnel stench that seemed to come from the now slowly opening door, and a nasty, slopping sound, a soggy sloshing that was paralyzingly frightful. It was this latter that sent me reeling back. Dr. Shrewsbury ran for the detonator, even as the door swung wide and a thing of abyssmal horror loomed there to fill it. I cannot describe it. It was similar to the thing in the subterranean lake in the Cordillera de Vilcanota in Peru, yet it was somehow more hideous, more awful, for it did not have the multiplicity of tentacles, but rather a protoplasmic formlessness which was clearly directed by an intelligence which could shape it in any way it chose. Thus, its first appearance was as of a mass of doughy flesh filling the entire doorway; then suddenly a great, malign eye appeared in its mass; and at the same time the amorphous mass began to ooze out around the doorway with an ugly, nauseatingly retching sound, accompanied by a wild fluted whistling.

"At that moment Dr. Shrewsbury pushed the detonator, and the stones around the portal burst asunder and heavenward before the terrible force of the explosive which Dr. Shrewsbury had brought. The monolithic pillars and slabs broke and collapsed upon the thing in the doorway.

"Without wasting a moment, Dr. Shrewsbury chanted his command to the winged creatures, who came out of the fog-bound heavens to aid our escape from the accursed island. But we did not get away before I saw yet one thing more, even more awful than what had gone before. For the thing which had been blown to shreds by the explosion, and crushed by the vast monolithic stones, was *reforming*, like water running together, shaping itself together by means of a thousand tentacles of oozing protoplasm, pushing its way with incredible rapidity over the green-black muck of the earth toward us even as that earth began to tremble and quake, possibly as a result of the thunderous, deafening detonation which may have set off subterrene rumblings to disturb the precarious existence of this island.

"Then we mounted the bat-winged creatures and returned to the house on Curwen Street."

IV

IT WAS after this dream that I sought the advice of Dr. Asenath DeVoto in Boston. Certain events, prosaic enough in themselves, but with such terrible implications, had taken place, that I could no longer be sure of my sanity; I had to have the assurance of a competent psychiatrist—though, ironically, the only immediate advice DeVoto could give me after hearing what I had to say, was to leave the house on Curwen Street and Arkham as soon as it was possible to do so, for it was conclusively shown, he held, that Dr. Shrewsbury and his ancient house had a deleterious effect on me. He made no attempt to explain the curious facts of which I grew cognizant after I awoke from that shuddersome third dream, beyond brushing them off as hallucinatory convictions which had been made to fit into my dreams after their actual occurrence, suggesting that in my some-

what abnormal state I had brought into being the physical facts which tended to show that *the dreams in the house on Curwen Street were not dreams at all, but horrible, grotesque fantasies in which I had somehow taken actual, physical part!*

How else could I explain what had taken place, and what was yet to take place?

For the events following that trio of dreams now occurred with such rapidity that it was nothing short of astounding that I should not before have stumbled upon the key to the mystery, incredible as it was, unready as I was to accept it or even to recognize it. Even then, perhaps, if it had not been for the agitation of Professor Shrewsbury, that profound disturbance of his equanimity which prevented him from removing my shoes, I might not have known.

For when I awoke on that morning, I discovered that my shoes were covered with greenish-black muck—*the same soil as that of that hellish, accursed Pacific Isle of the last dream! Not only that, but in my pocket, just where I had put it in the dream, was that strange stone in the shape of a five-pointed star, covered with hieroglyphs utterly beyond my understanding!*

There might—there *might,* I say, have been a logical explanation of these two single factors; it could have been possible for anyone who might have had some knowledge of my dreams, to have doctored my shoes, and got ready such a stone; but no one could have "planted" the third fact, so prosaic in itself that its very mundane aspects made its appearance all the more frightful. For in the inner pocket of my coat I found a copy of the *London Times,* folded back to that very *Fortean Mystery* of the dock-worker we had visited, *a copy of the paper of the day before, so recent that it could by no natural power on earth have reached the house on Curwen Street!*

This discovery sent me to that unsatisfactory visit with Dr. DeVoto, and it brought me back to confront Dr. Shrewsbury. But my employer's agitation was such, that I was forestalled in what I wished to say not only by the pallor and haggardness of his features, but by the rush of words that greeted me inmediately on my return from Boston.

"Where have you been, Andrew? But, no matter—hurry now; take my files down to the library of Miskatonic University. There some future student may make good use of them."

With deep astonishment I saw that he had been going over his files in my absence, and had made selections of various folders and boxes of material which he wished to remove to a more permanent setting. But his agitation, and the strangeness of his manner gave me little time in which to contemplate his behavior, for, having thus urged me to make all possible speed to the library with his precious documents and papers, he went about the room selecting further material to add to the growing mound in the middle of the study floor—books, the manuscript of the first part of his second book, old texts, notes he had made from the borrowed copies of the *Pnakotic Manuscript,* the *Necronomicon,* and others, particularly a sealed folio which had been labeled in his hand the *Celaeno Fragments,* and which Dr. Shrewsbury had been careful to make clear I was not to read.

All the time he alternately murmured aloud such phrases as, "I should not have taken him! It was a mistake!" while he looked at me with a kind of weary commiseration—or, what was still more startling and frightening, he paused from time to time and listened, his eyes turned toward that side of the house which looked out across the street upon the shore of the Miskatonic River, as if he expected to hear the sound of his approaching doom. So unnerving was this, that when I left the house I cast a furtive, fearful glance to-

ward the river shore myself; but in the afternoon sunlight it was a reassuring sight indeed.

WHEN I returned, I found my employer standing in deep absorption before the opened folio of the *Celaeno Fragments*. And once again I had evidence of his strange sensitivity, for I had come into the room very quietly, soundlessly, and his back was turned to me; yet he began to speak the moment I entered.

"My only question is whether there is not danger in giving these notes to the world. Though I ought not to fear that there are many who would place any credence in what I took down from those great stones. Fort is dead, Lovecraft is gone—" He shook his head.

I came up behind him and looked over his shoulder. My eyes fell upon what was obviously a recipe, but so filled was it with strange names, that I looked to the text below. What I read there supplied another link in the damning chain of evidence pointing to hideous possibilities in the voids of time and space, hitherto unknown to man. For there, in Dr. Shrewsbury's fine script, was written this legend: "The golden mead of the Elder Gods renders the drinker insensible to the effects of time and space, so that he may travel in these dimensions; moreover, it heightens his sensory perceptions so that he remains constantly in a state bordering upon dream."

This far I read before my employer closed the folio and set about sealing it once more.

"The mead!" I exclaimed. "Your mead!"

"Yes, yes, Andrew," he said quickly. "How else did you suppose? But I forget; one ought not to permit one's imagination to trap one."

"Imagination!" I protested. "Is it imagination that I had mud from that island on my shoes this morning, and the stone in my pocket, and the *London Times* in my coat? I don't know—I only suspect in the light of what I've learned here, how it was done—but I know we were there."

He looked at me for a long moment contemplatively.

"Weren't we?" I demanded.

Even then I hoped that somehow he would have a logical, reasonable explanation to offer me; heaven knows how eagerly I would have accepted it! But he only shook his head wearily, touched my arm as if to reassure me, and said, "Yes."

"And that night in June—that second night, after we were in the cave—you went back with your explosive and blasted that hellish place. I heard you scrambling down the rocks, I heard the blast."

"Ah! Then you took some mead that night. You were in my room."

I nodded.

"Perhaps I should have told you. But it was my error—I should not have taken you along. I was in one phase too careful, and in another too careless, assuming wrongly that you would never know. But now they have seen us, now they know who it is blasting and sealing those doors from their aeon-old borderland—" He shook his head once more. "Now—now it is too late!"

His tone was so ominous that for a moment I could say nothing whatever. Then, a little thickly, I asked, "What do you mean?"

"Even now they are pursuing us. There is activity below Devil Reef off Innsmouth in the city of Y'ha-nthlei, and great beings have come from R'lyeh. Listen! Listen to those hellish footsteps!— But I forget, you cannot, you have not had your sensibilities forever made keener as I had in those twenty years."

"Yes, those twenty years," I repeated, my mind flashing back to that curiously foreboding scene in the library of Miska-

tonic University. "Where were you in that time?"

"I was on Celaeno—in that great library of ancient monolithic stones with their books and hieroglyphs stolen from the Elder Gods."

HE STOPPED suddenly, cocking his head a little to one side, and after listening in that position very briefly, he began to tremble, his mouth twisted in distaste and loathing, and he turned on me with a curt order to hurry, to carry the remaining material to the Miskatonic University Library, and to come back even faster, for the hour was rapidly approaching evening, and I was not to spend another night in this house. When I returned, he said, everything would be ready for my departure.

So indeed it was, and the professor was more agitated than I had ever previously seen him. I had been subjected to the always maddening delay of red tape pertaining to the acceptance of Dr. Shrewsbury's books and papers, including a searching interview with Dr. Llanfer, the director of the library, who, after a glance through my first load had asked that I be sent into his office so that he could tell me that he had ordered my employer's papers placed in the locked vault with the single rare copy of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred's *Necronomicon* in the possession of Miskatonic University. The result of this delay was that time passed more quickly than I had thought, for it was at sundown that I returned to the house on Curwen Street.

"Good God! my boy, where were you!" demanded Dr. Shrewsbury.

But he gave me no time to answer, for once again he stopped to listen. And this time I, too, felt what he must have felt—that powerful surging forward of an aura of age-old evil, as if the latent possibilities of the old house's atmosphere had come suddenly into malign life; I, too, heard—at first only a curious water sound, as of something swimming, and then that terrible trembling of the bowels of the earth, shuddering upward from below, *as if some great being walked in the watery places under the earth!*

"You must go at once," said my employer in a troubled voice. "You have the five-pointed stone from the island?"

I nodded.

He seized my arm in a tenacious grip. "Do you remember the formula for summoning the interstellar creatures who serve Hastur?"

Again I nodded.

He took from his pocket the counterpart of the little whistle he had blown upon and also a small phial which, I saw, contained some of that strange golden mead. "Here, then—keep this with you, and the stone, too. The Deep Ones cannot hurt you if you carry the stone; but the stone alone is powerless against the others. Go to Boston, to New York, anywhere—but leave Arkham, leave this accursed place. And if you hear that walker in the depths of the earth, in the waters under the earth, do not hesitate—take the mead, keep the star by you, and repeat the formula. They will come for you. They will take you to Celaeno, where I am going once again until the others will give up seeking me. But keep the stone; I did not have it, and at first they tortured me—but have no fear, they will not touch you. If you must come, I will be there."

I took the phial, filled with a thousand questions I wanted to ask but could not. For the aura of the house was oppressive with terror; its very air throbbed wtih menace, and from under the house came such a wave of sheer horror that all my senses cried aloud for escape.

"They are at the mouth of the Miskatonic now," said the professor thoughtfully. "But I am ready. Some of them are coming up the river—soon now, soon

now." He turned on me once more. "But go, Andrew. *Go!*"

He made as if to thrust me forth, but in his sudden effort he fell sideways and struck one of the shelves nearby so that his glasses were knocked off—and what I saw then sent me screaming from that accursed house on Curwen Street into the fog-bound darkness outside. Did I dream, too, in that frightful flight that creatures with webbed feet and hands whose great batrachian eyes gleamed phosphorescently at me out of the darkness were creeping from the water of the Miskatonic River across the street? I did not hesitate, I did not once pause. Clutching the whistle and the phial of golden liquid close to me, I ran for my life, haunted by the sight of Professor Shrewsbury's face as I saw it in the half-darkness of that doomed house. *For though I had seen him read his papers and his notes, though he had described appearances, though he had given a thousand evidences of his keen vision, above that strange second sight he seemed to have, in that maddening moment when his glasses were struck from his face, I saw where his eyes should have been the dark pits of empty sockets!*

V

ONLY a fortnight has gone by since the events I have chronicled. The house on Curwen Street was totally destroyed by fire on the night of my wild flight, and Dr. Shrewsbury has been presumed to have perished in the holocaust; but though I have pursued the most assiduous inquiry, I have been unable to find proof that any human bones were found in the ruins. I can only suppose that Dr. Shrewsbury somehow made his escape. It seems clear to me now, as I write, under the pressure of a fear far more terrible than that I shared with my one-time employer, that Dr. Shrewsbury had set himself upon the trail of great Cthulhu, intent upon closing all avenues to the Outside. That, I say, is the trend of such evidence as I have been able to amass. And he had learned how to utilize the strange creatures from other, alien dimensions out of time and space, in his pursuit of Cthulhu, intent upon saving the world he knew from enslavement to a ghastly era or aeon-old evil completely beyond the comprehension of mankind!

I have looked up Celaeno. It is that star in the Pleiades which lies between Alcyone and Electra on the one side, and Maia and Taygeta on the other. It does not seem possible—and yet, if what Dr. Shrewsbury wrote or suspected is correct, the dark lake of Hali is not far away, near Aldebaran, the abode of Him Who Is Not To Be Named, Hastur, the Unspeakable, who is served, these ancient legends will have it, by strange, bat-winged creatures who can travel in time and space.

For the past few hours, here in my room in Boston, I have been trying to tell myself again, as so often I have done, that it was all a ghastly dream, one of those strange adventures of mental dislocation which sometimes happen to men. But I am no longer able to say this with much belief. For as I came home this evening from my frugal supper, I had a glimpse of a shuddersome countenance, and once more that curiously grotesque Tenniel illustration of the footman for the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland* flashed into mind, and then, those others—those web-handed creatures in the guise of men who haunted my dreams! And now, surely it is not my imagination that is responsible for the conviction that something walks beneath me in the waters of the earth! Surely I, who have never been overly blessed with imagination, cannot be dreaming this!

For out of the depths beneath the house comes a horrible sucking sound, as of great protoplasmic flesh scuffing along pon-

derously in a place of waters and muck—a sound like that nasty, sloppy, nauseating slithering we heard on that hellish Pacific island just before the Thing came oozing out from behind that hideous carven door! I have locked my room and thrown open the window, but everywhere there is menace—I cannot turn without fear, I fancy I see those great monolithic stones with their terrible bas-reliefs looking out at me from every corner of the room, or Professor Shrewsbury's face with those horrible, pitted sockets where his eyes should have been, or the batrachian frog-men.

And now—now that the Pleiades and Celaeno are above the horizon in the northeast, I have taken the golden mead; I have gone to the window and blown upon that curiously carven whistle Professor Shrewsbury gave me in that last frantic hour together.

I have stood there and called forth into the spaceless void of time his words—*"Iä! Iä! Hastur! Hastur cf'ayak 'vulgtmm, vugtlagln, vulgtmm! Ai! Ai! Hastur!"*

The footsteps continue—ghastly, sloshing sounds—they seem just under the house now; and outside there is the terrible slapping sound like that made by those awful web-footed creatures that slithered toward us over the rocks on that Pacific island.

But now—something more—Great God! Wings! *What beings at the window!*

Iä! Iä! Hastur fhtagn . . . !

Epilogue from the Boston *Herald* for September 3:

No further clue to the strange and remarkable disappearance of Andrew Phelan, 28, of 17 Thoreau Drive, has been unearthed. It is assumed that the young man effected his disappearance voluntarily; the door of his room was locked and, though one window of his room stood open, there is no evidence to show that he dropped to the ground below or mounted to the roof, both places having been subjected to the most minute scrutiny. No motive can be ascribed to his act. However, a cousin of Mr. Phelan expressed some doubt about his sanity at the time of his disappearance, deposing that he had seemed to be listening for sounds as of some supernatural pursuer. Since this manifestation of irrationality coincides with the strange manuscript he left behind him, it is believed that in some fashion, for reasons unknown, Mr. Phelan made away with himself. . . .

Ghouls Feeding

By DAMON KNIGHT

YOU mortals hate us, drive us from the light;
You make our name a thing of horrid fear.
Because of you the Brothers gather here,
To feed beneath the secrecy of night.

Then strut your hour, and pæans loudly sing;
Your wealth tot up, and gloat upon its sum.
And reach the End of Roads at last, to come
Where all men must; to pay the Reckoning.

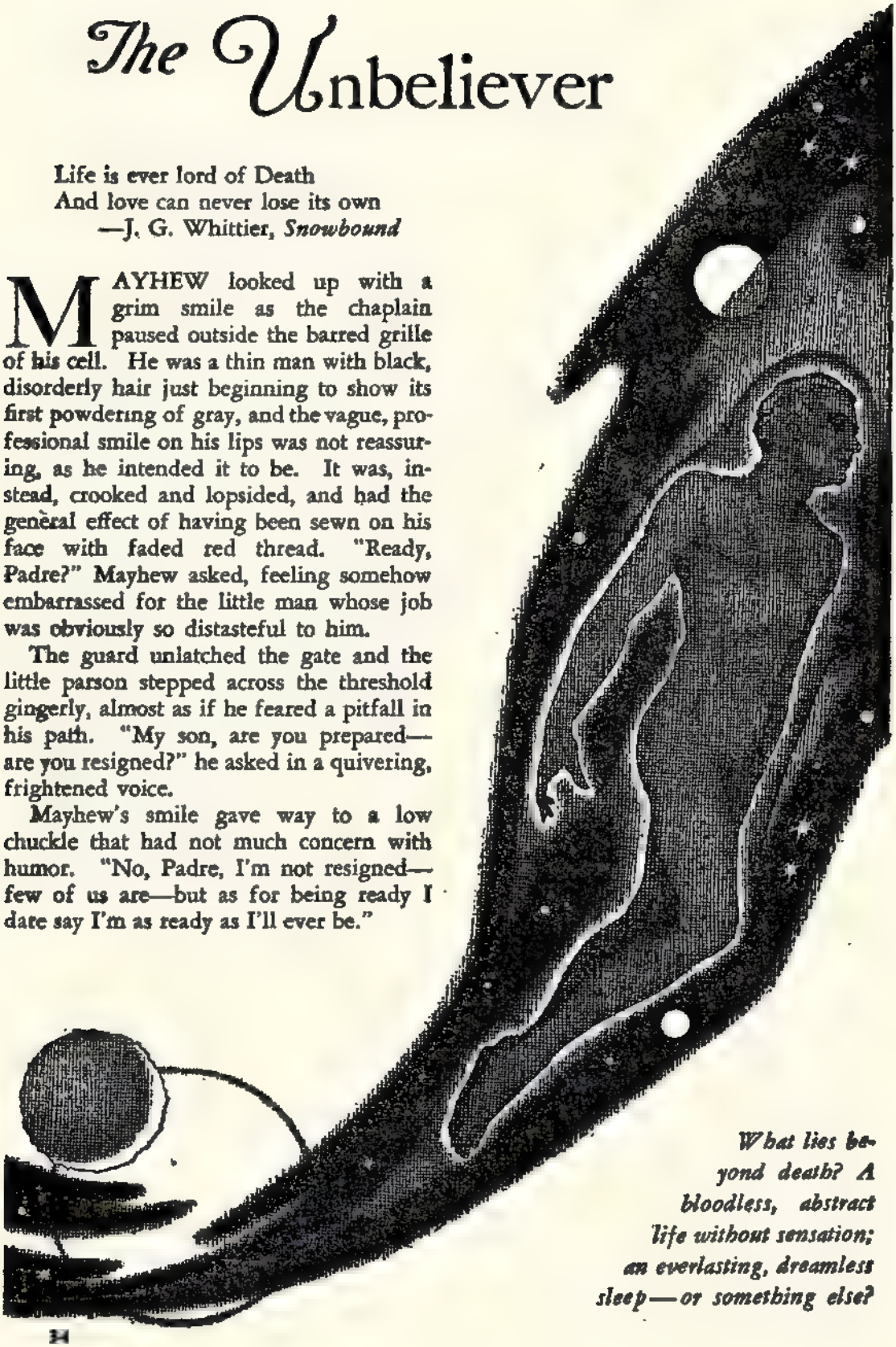
The Unbeliever

Life is ever lord of Death
And love can never lose its own
—J. G. Whittier, *Snowbound*

MAYHEW looked up with a grim smile as the chaplain paused outside the barred grille of his cell. He was a thin man with black, disorderly hair just beginning to show its first powdering of gray, and the vague, professional smile on his lips was not reassuring, as he intended it to be. It was, instead, crooked and lopsided, and had the general effect of having been sewn on his face with faded red thread. "Ready, Padre?" Mayhew asked, feeling somehow embarrassed for the little man whose job was obviously so distasteful to him.

The guard unlatched the gate and the little parson stepped across the threshold gingerly, almost as if he feared a pitfall in his path. "My son, are you prepared—are you resigned?" he asked in a quivering, frightened voice.

Mayhew's smile gave way to a low chuckle that had not much concern with humor. "No, Padre, I'm not resigned—few of us are—but as for being ready I date say I'm as ready as I'll ever be."



What lies beyond death? A bloodless, abstract life without sensation; an everlasting, dreamless sleep—or something else?

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV.

"Then"—the chaplain's voice was still more hesitant, almost tremulous—"we'll read a portion of the Scripture together—"

Mayhew ground the fire out of his cigarette and there was only kindness in the look he bent upon the clergyman. He was genuinely sorry for this man, sorry and embarrassed as one might be for a child who forgets the words he has to speak on a platform or an actor who is overcome by stage fright. "Don't bother, Padre. There's nothing in that book of yours that's going to help me over this hump, and as for praying—I never was much of a one to talk to myself, and I hate to hear another person do it. You just run along and come back with the warden when it's time. That won't be long, will it?"

"Only half an hour, my son."

"That's fine. I'll smoke a cigarette and do some thinking—maybe you'd call it searching my soul—and when they're ready for me, if you want to read or pray"—he made a vague gesture which might have indicated almost anything—"well, I'll be waiting for you. Go on," his voice grew suddenly harsh, "scram out of here. I don't want to be bothered with you this last half hour."

"Unfortunate man"—the cleric's words were sharp with righteous indignation—"do you not realize you stand upon the threshold of eternity? Have you no contrition for your sins?"

"I have a lot of it, Padre, but not the kind you mean. I'm sorry that I didn't take advantage of my opportunities; I'm grieved to think I may have caused sorrow to others, and if I had it in my power I'd blot out certain things I've said, but I've no regret for having killed Bill Stokes. I'd do it again in like circumstances."

As the chaplain left him with a degree of celerity that belied his expressed desire

By SEABURY QUINN

to remain Mayhew sank down on his cot and lit another cigarette.

He wanted time to think, he'd said. And that was just another excuse, just another not too clever device to rid himself of the chaplain's presence and save the little minister an unpleasant duty. He had been thinking furiously all day, trying vainly to bring order to the chaos of his thoughts, to make them quit revolving rapidly—and futilely—as squirrels in a cage.

At last he had reduced the tangled skein to some semblance of pattern, and the chaplain's advent had delayed the process of the final sorting. Now he had to think faster than ever if he were to be done before they came. . . .

It was inevitable, of course, that he should have killed Bill Stokes. As mathematically certain as that two and two make four. Fate had dealt the black ace of death from her marked deck the first day they met in kindergarten when, for no apparent cause, they had made for each other and in an instant were locked in furious combat. Teacher and schoolmates separated them and scoldings reinforced by sound slaps kept them in order, but from the moment of their meeting they were like two chemicals waiting for a suitable catalytic to explode them.

In grade school they were rivals, working not so much to make good marks as to outdo each other. Athletics added point and edge to rivalry in high school, and when each fixed his affections on Muriel Johnson the dice of destiny were cast irrevocably.

They were antitheses in every way. Bob Mayhew was hazel-eyed, dark-haired, small-boned and delicate, as sensitive and neurotic as a girl. He played the piano—Grieg, Tschaikowsky, Beethoven and Chopin; he had a talent for composing verse, played excellent chess and was a natural linguist, taking honors in French, Latin and Spanish. Despite his slender stature he could swim like a merman, ride like a centaur, run the hundred yard dash in champion form and shoot a rifle and revolver with unerring accuracy.

WILLIAM SYLVINUS STOKES 3rd stood six feet without shoes, and tipped the scales at better than a hundred ninety pounds, but there was not an ounce of fat on him. His hair was almost straw-colored, his eyes were gray and far apart, his chin square with a deep dimple in it. He rowed stroke in the school racing shell, leaped over hurdles on the track almost as easily as if they had been shadows on the ground, boxed better than the average professional and took top rank in physics, chemistry and math. Poetry and poets he despised, music, unless it could be danced to, was merely noise to him, and with all the lustiness of a strong nature he detested Bob Mayhew. With an even greater fervor he adored Muriel Johnson.

Nor was it strange that she should appeal to these youths of diverse tastes and character. Indeed, few normal men could have withstood her charm. She was not tall, but seemed so because of her superb carriage. Her skin was very fair, with the white, creamy loveliness that goes with hair of the shade commonly and unjustly called red—really a fine rich sepia brown with strands of ruddy raw gold running through it. Her eyes were not true brown, they were a sort of golden-orange, almost the shade of topaz, and with their gold-tinged brows and lashes they gave the impression of strange barbaric jewels set in the ivory exquisiteness of her face by a master craftsman.

Both boys asked her to the senior prom, but Bob was half an hour before Bill, who swallowed his chagrin with such grace as he could, took Helen Collier in place of his beloved Muriel, drank too much punch—which, since it was the period of Prohibition and hip-flasks, had been surreptitiously

and liberally laced with gin—and during intermission found opportunity to meet Mayhew outside the gymnasium and give him a most scientific, thorough beating.

Of course, Muriel was outraged and vowed she'd never speak to either of the claimants for her favors again. But as everybody knows a woman's no may mean maybe, and in time her maybe become yes, and in addition, no one feminine since Trojan Helen's day has known herself to be the cause of masculine contention without at least an inner glow of secret satisfaction. So before September she was friendly with both boys again, and both were welcomed at her home and went with her to the movies or to dances or on boating trips and picnics, but with consummate diplomacy she contrived to keep them apart. One fight might have romantic implications; a series of them would prove embarrassing.

In the fall the boys went off to college, Bill to study architecture, Bob to prepare for the foreign service, and by an odd coincidence neither could get home for Christmas holiday in his junior year and each sent her a puppy. Bill's was a lovely fringed-legged English setter with a white blaze on its auburn-haired forehead. Bob sent a saucy little Scottish terrier with bright inquisitive eyes, an insatiable appetite for rubbers, party slippers and kid gloves, and an all-pervasive friendliness that was especially manifest when his feet were muddy. Muriel loved them impartially, and when John o' Gaunt the setter met death beneath a drunken motorist's juggernaut she wept inconsolably, and when Tam o' Shanter, grieving too for his dead playmate, thrust a dry, black, sympathetic nose into her hand and licked her fingers with a moist pink tongue she gathered him into her arms and cuddled him as if he were a baby. "You're all I have left now, Tammie," she sobbed. "You'll have to be so good to me—" and the small, black, whiskered Scottish gentleman bestowed a kiss of fealty on her chin.

She sent them identical gifts at graduation, and since they received their diplomas the same day, maintained impartiality by staying away from both ceremonies.

BILL came back to a position with Alstein, James & Tetlow, where as an architectural engineer he won quick recognition. He could figure load capacities for steel foundation piles sunk through soft soil, water and quicksand to bed rock, and plan a girder superstructure to resist side strains and wind pressures with the nicety of a navigator charting his position, and delighted in the work; but he took no interest in the merely beautiful. The columns round the Parthenon he looked upon as mere surplusage, and the soaring spires of Notre Dame, Milan and Canterbury were in his opinion not beautiful, they merely used unnecessary material and served no useful purpose. He was practical, intensely so, as the warehouses, factories and loft buildings he designed bore testimony. Strong, useful serviceable buildings they were, built to last a generation, to fulfill their functions perfectly, and having no more beauty than a string of freight cars waiting on a railway siding.

Bob passed examinations for the foreign service *cum laude* and was sent from consulate to consulate in the Far East, acquiring intimate knowledge of the peoples who had been no more than names in books to him—Koreans, Japanese, Tibetans, Tartars, Turkomans, White Russian refugees, Persians, Cossacks, Armenians, and highly improbable hybrids of them all.

From these contacts he learned many things, but principally that people were just people, whatever race had spawned them, and that the Seven Deadly Sins were by no means the exclusive heritage of "the heathen." At first he had been puz-

zled by his chiefs' attitude toward missionaries. One of his earliest recollections was Rally Day at Sunday School when pennies, dimes and nickels were collected for the foreign missions. One of the first tunes that he learned began:

From Greenland's icy mountains
To India's coral strand . . .
The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.

But the missionaries, he discovered, worshiped gods as numerous and diverse as those they came to lead into the Light. They all served the same Lord, at least they called Him the same name, but some of them declared the Lord was displeased by the use of wine, others were as certain that He looked with disfavor upon tobacco. Some said the unbeliever might be received in the fold with mere sprinkling of water, while others solemnly declared that only full immersion could wash away sin, and with a few notable exceptions all of them were voluble in warnings and denunciations directed against all the rest. So, since they all claimed to have direct communication from on high, and since their several messages of Grace were radically different, the heathen could not be blamed greatly for refusing to abandon the faith of his fathers in favor of some special brand of Grace provided by some special brand of missionary—and denounced by all the rest. "What those birds need," the secretary of the consulate had said one day in disgust, "is a neatly lettered sign reading: 'Don't Go Next Door and Get Cheated. Come in Here.'"

Accordingly the faith that had never been very strong in him decreased until it was almost entirely atrophied and in its stead he had developed something not quite cynicism, but something not far from it. Fourteen words defined his attitude: Prayer is communing with your inner ego. Faith is accepting what your reason rejects.

When a much delayed mail brought a heavy envelope enclosing a second one in which was tucked a neatly engraved request for the honor of his presence at the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ashton Johnson's daughter Muriel to Mr. William Sylvinus Stokes III the little remnant of belief that had persisted from his childhood was utterly extinguished as a guttering candle in a blast of wind.

She was the only thing he'd ever longed for with whole heart and soul. The night before he set sail for Kobe he had told her of his love and begged her to wait for him. "The Foreign Service is like the Army, Muriel. A man must win promotion slowly, but there's nothing that can hold me back if you—"

"It wouldn't be fair to you or myself, Bobbie," she had interrupted. "I know I love you and have always loved you. You are so sweet, so kind and gentle. When we are together I feel as if we were the only two people in the world. But—I'm not sure that I love you well enough to put my life into your hands forever. We've known each other almost all our lives, dear. Maybe it's more the love of a sister for an adored brother that I feel for you—"

"You mean there's someone else?"

"No, Bobbie; no! There's no one else. I know what you are thinking, but it isn't so, my dear. I feel almost exactly about Bill as I feel about you. He's like a brother, too. A big, rough brother, not kind and gentle and understanding like you, but very, very dear to me. Please try to understand, Bob"—her hands trembled in his and her lower lip began to quiver like a little girl's about to cry—"I can't make up my mind. I honestly can't do it, dear, but—"

"Yes, but?" he prompted as she fell silent.

Her eyes were wide and soft and her mouth was tender. "I think," she whis-

pered in a voice so small and tremulous that he could hardly hear it, "I'm almost sure, my dear, that it is you." Then she turned her sweet cool lips up for his kiss and he held her in his arms a long, trembling moment.

And afterwards the clicking of steel wheels against steel rails, the thudding throb of steamship engines, the shrill cries of the 'rickshaw boys—but always through the babel of the traffic and the clattering confusion of a dozen gabbling foreign tongues there was the echo of her whispered promise, the feel of her sweet lips on his, the memory of the sweetness of her perfumed body in his arms.

Despite his waning faith he had still prayed, not regularly, but at odd intervals when some trick of memory brought the image of her to his mind: "O Lord, grant that it may be as she said, that I may be the one of her choice. Help her to endure the waiting, and speed the day when I may go to her. Make me worthy of her, Lord. Amen."

And then the tardy invitation to her wedding to Bill Stokes . . . "the honor of your presence is requested. . . ." He sent them a magnificent silver service, the salvaged remnant of some Russian prince's treasures worth twenty times the hundred yuan dollars he paid the Armenian pawnbroker at Harbin for it. But he never prayed again, nor did he ever cross the threshold of a church.

AS FOR Muriel, the echo of the epithalamium had hardly had a chance to fade before she realized her mistake. Bill was a success, a go-getter; hearty, healthy, robust, wholly masculine. He had no patience with nor understanding of a woman's moods—"Of course we'll have steak, French fried potatoes and coffee. Everybody likes that," he'd order in a restaurant, and the fact that she would have preferred a romaine salad with hot rolls and tea made no difference. His likes and dislikes were intensely personal, husband and wife were one person, and that person principally husband. Didn't the Bible say so? Very well, then. He went to church regularly and insisted that she go with him. Not to St. Luke's where she had worshiped since childhood, but to the big, ugly red-brick First Church at Twenty-fourth Street and the Boulevard, where the minister spoke vaguely of rainbows, stars and similar celestial phenomena, lamented the recession of the XVIIIth Amendment and occasionally lashed out at such contemners of the Word as Roman Catholics, atheists, Christian Scientists and Episcopalians.

After dinner he liked to read the sporting and financial pages of the paper and in the course of his reading he absorbed half a dozen highballs, which instead of making him fatuously good-natured made him just a little cross, a trifle more dogmatically positive in expressions of opinion.

There was a harsh streak in his make-up, not exactly vulgarity, but a sort of brazen self-assertiveness that galled her like a hairshirt. There was nothing shy or loverlike in his advances, he was forthright as a satyr in his demands. After all, why should he sue for the embraces that were his by right? A man would be as great a fool to court his wife as to continue running after having caught his street car.

Then Clotho, Lachesis and Atropes, the three weird sisters, whose office is to spin the thread of human destiny, took up the strands of these three lives and knotted them into a snarl past all untying. The package came marked "Customs Free—Diplomatic," and when Muriel undid the red wax seals that fastened it and laid the layers of rice paper aside there was a Chinese scarf that spilled breath-taking greens and blues and yellows into the room. "Oh,

see, Bill, how lovely!" she exclaimed. "Bob sent it to us for an anniversary gift—"

"He did, eh?" Bill was in a vicious mood that afternoon, for it was Saturday and he had had an engagement to play golf with a prospective client, but the rain that sweated on the windows and made canals of the streets had canceled it. "He's got a nerve, sending those heathen gimcracks to another man's wife."

"He didn't send it to me, he sent it to us, and heathen or not, it's beautiful, the loveliest thing I've ever—"

"Oh, yeah?" Bill was on his feet now, a little unsteady, knocking against the table and oversetting his half-consumed highball. "What's beautiful about it? Just a lot o' garish color—" He took the shawl in his hands, wrenching at it as if he would tear it into shreds, but the tough fabric held, and with a muttered oath he tossed it into the grate where a fire of cannel coal blazed.

"Bill!" Reproach mingled with outraged amazement was in her voice. "How could you?"

There was no humor in the grin he turned on her. "I could, all right, and I'd do the same thing to the sissy-pants who sent it if I had him here. The stinkin' little sneak—"

"He's not!" her hot denial interrupted. "He was always sweet and kind and gentle—"

"Maybe you should have married him instead of me. He's more your style than I; you'd like someone to kiss your hand and write verse to you, wouldn't you? Someone who can't make a nickel for himself, but has to take a salary, skulking on the outskirts of the world like a—"

"You're drunk!" she flung at him. "Drunk with whiskey and your own conceit. You think that you're successful because you've made money. All right, if that's your criterion, any gangster, no matter how low or depraved, can make money, and more of it than you. If making money is your measure of a man, then Al Capone and Hymie Weiss and Frankie Yale are all better men than you—they all made more—"

"Shut up!" It was not like the usually submissive Muriel to show such spirit, and he hardly knew whether to be more annoyed than amazed. "If you think so much of him, why don't you leave me and go to him? Go on, nobody's stopping you!"

He had meant only to give her a half rough, half playful shove, but his hand was unsteady and anger lent force to his thrust, so that instead of subsiding ludicrously on the sofa she staggered back a pace or two unsteadily, fought for her balance futilely, and fell heavily, striking her face on the carved leg of the coffee table.

Tam o' Shanter had crouched on the hearth rug, an interested spectator to the argument. Perhaps he understood their words—dogs have a greater understanding than we give them credit for—perhaps their tones alone told him that anger underlay their bickering, but when he saw his beloved mistress fall he launched himself at Bill like an avenging fury, barking with the strident, hysterical yelp of the infuriated terrier before he fleshed his teeth in Bill's ankle.

"What th'—" Stark amazement and shrill pain wrung the exclamation from the man. "You, too? He gave you to her, didn't he? She let the pup I gave her die, but she saved you. Oh, yes—" His heavy Scotch grain brogan swung with the force of a battering-ram and sent the small black furry body in a low parabola across the floor until it crashed into the wall. There was a sharp staccato of agony, the threshing of short legs as Tammie fought for breath, then the trickle of bright blood on the protruding tongue as broken ribs thrust through the tortured lungs. The screeching yelp subsided to a

groan that ended in a labored, panting gasp, a tremor ran through the tormented little body, and Tammie's gallant head fell sidewise and lay still.

"I'm sorry, Mu, I didn't mean to hurt him, but he bit me—" Bill reached awkwardly to pat his wife's shoulder as she cradled the dead terrier in her arms. "Good Lord, I wouldn't have done it intentionally for any—"

The suppurating fury in her eyes stopped him. This was not anger that he saw in her gold-orange pupils, it was hatred coiling like a live thing, a smoldering aversion that had burst into a sudden writhing flame to make her topaz eyes glow like garnets. She raked him with a glance of detestation as she spit one word at him with concentrated venom. "Murderer!"

An hour later she had gone and Bill sat by the fire and drew such comfort as he could from a fresh bottle of Scotch and the repeated self-assurance, "She'll be back; she's bound to come back. She can't run out on me this way. Why, we're married!"

But Muriel did not come back and three days later O'Brien & Schwarz served him with a summons in a suit for divorce, alleging drunkenness and cruelty.

The order *nisi* had been signed, but legally they were still man and wife when Bob came home on furlough and almost the first voice to greet him was Muriel's. "I'm getting a divorce from Bill," she told him. "It's not final yet, but—"

"Will you have luncheon with me tomorrow?" he broke in eagerly. "Anywhere you say. The Adlon? Fine! I'll meet you in the Princesse Room at twelve. And Muriel—"

"Yes?" The bird-thrill in her voice proclaimed she knew what he would say before he spoke, but womanlike she waited for his words.

"I—you—there was a question I asked you before I went away. Could—would you be willing to hear it again?"

Her answer was more a whisper than a voice. It came across the wire murmurously, like the soughing of a small wind through new-budded trees. "I was a fool not to have listened before, dear. I shan't make the same mistake twice."

TIME flowed backward for them when they met next day. He had left when apple blossoms fluttered like hurt butterflies through the soft April air; now, when he was returning, spring was once more there, clear, windy-bright. The whole city was bathed in sunshine, and crocuses were peeping through the grass.

The face of each was poignantly familiar to the other, but the intervening years had changed them subtly. Seven years in the far places of the world had taken every trace of adolescence from Robert. He was a slim and neatly built man dressed in Scottish tweeds that draped a trifle loosely on him. His sleek brown hair showed a tendency to recede at the temples, his hazel eyes were alert, his face was deeply tanned by sun and wind; there was about him the look of a man familiar with all climates and all types of people.

Muriel had changed, too. She had been a girl when he had left, now she was a woman, mature and lovely. Age had stolen some of her bloom but the calmness and repose that it had given more than compensated for the lost flush of girlhood. Her skin was pale—as it had always been—and there were lavender shadows beneath her eyes and in the eyes themselves there was a hardness born of disillusion. But the hardness vanished as she saw him and came forward, both hands extended, a quince-colored flush in her cheeks and her lips trembling.

"Oh, Bob, my very dearest," she whispered. "You can't know how much I have missed you; how glad I am that you

are back!" She raised her lips for his kiss naturally and unaffectedly.

He followed her to the table the *maitre d'hotel* indicated and thought that in all his wanderings in all the fabled cities of the East, where women whose sole stock in trade and fortune was their beauty, congregated, he had never seen a face so lovely or a body that stood so straight or so proudly. This, he told himself, was the true flowering. Youth was but the bud, the promise. Its sparkle was all on the surface. This beautiful, mature woman was fulfillment of youth's promise, youth's sparkle had become an inward glow in her.

A little smile, half deprecating, half embarrassed, rippled across her lips. "I'm being most unladylike, aren't I?" she asked as she stared into the tawny depths of her Martini with brooding tawny eyes. "You know, I'm practically throwing myself at you, saying, 'Here's a bit of shopworn goods. They wouldn't let you have it when it was all new and shiny-bright, but now it's on the bargain counter. Take it at your own price.'" She raised her glass and the huge topaz on her finger re-echoed the matching jewels in her ears and the topaz eyes which suddenly seemed to have become hard and empty as the stones themselves. "I know I've been a fool, Bob. A silly addle-pated fool that had no better sense than to mistake propinquity for love. But I've paid full price for my folly, dear. If you could know the agony of being linked to someone who lives in a different world from yours and thinks a different set of thoughts—almost speaks a different language—with no common meeting ground, no contacts, except the purely physical—I think his beating was more tolerable—"

"He beat you? The swine!"

"Only once." Her lips moved almost soundlessly as she twirled the stem of her glass between her fingers and looked into it intently. "And I'm not sure I didn't have it coming to me. I'd gotten fed up with his endless boasting of his success, and held the mirror up to him. Not the mirror in which he saw himself, but the one in which I saw him, and had been seeing him almost from our wedding day. His vanity's colossal, you know. I hit him on his tenderest point."

SHE was silent for a moment, then, "We'll have to be careful, Bob." Urgency lent sharpness to her voice. "I don't know if he really loves me—I rather think he does, as much as he's capable of loving anything or anyone—but I do know that he'll move heaven and earth to keep us apart. He was utterly dumbfounded when I left him, for I really think he thought that he'd done his full duty as a husband when he gave me food and clothes and shelter. But to have me go to you would be adding insult to injury, dear. You know he's always hated you—"

"It's been mutual, I assure you," Mayhew cut in dryly.

"Yes, dear, I understand, but you don't—you can't—know him as I do. He's terribly religious in a bigoted, intolerant way, and feels that I've disgraced him by divorcing him. The quarrel that led to our separation was about you. My final decree will not be signed for two months, and if he hears that I've been seeing you he'll feel as if you'd lured me away from him; as if he were the injured husband and you the guilty wife-stealer. I'm frightened, Robert, terribly frightened. Remember that night at the senior prom—"

"I'm not likely to forget it," he replied grimly. "My nose is still crooked where he broke it. But we're grown up now, Muriel. People don't do things like that in civilized communities. Now, if this were Outer Mongolia—"

"What's civilization? Just an overlie of veneer that can be scratched off by any claw of passion. He's big and very strong,

and arrogant in his strength. If he meets you—or me—he might—"

His laugh reassured her. "I'll be careful to keep out of his way, darling, at least until your decree has been made final. Meantime here comes the *bouillabaisse Marseille*—" Mentally he made a note to call on William Sylvinus Stokes, 3rd, and have a plain talk with him. Bill might be twice his size and a good boxer, but he had learned a trick or two in the Far East. If Bill should decide to get rough . . .

THE big man in the chromium-and-leather chair looked unbelievingly at Mayhew. "I didn't think you'd have the guts to come here," he muttered, almost as if he argued with himself. "You were always such a sneaking little stinker, playing the piano, writing poetry—"

Mayhew's eyes met the other's with cold steadiness. He was thinking how this splendid virile body and tough ruthless mind had broken under the strain of adversity. Stokes used to brag that he was made of iron. Iron was right. Cast iron. Hard and rigid, with no spring or give to it, no resiliency. He had always been bulky, now he was merely heavy, thick-fingered, beefy-shouldered, a little puffy at the waist, the acquisitive falcon-look gone from his face. His eyes were bloodshot—too much whiskey!—and looked dim and foul, like pools with scum on them.

"We needn't waste time in personalities, Stokes. We might find one or two things that you lack if we went into it deeply enough, but we won't. I've come to tell you Muriel and I are going to be married just as soon as her decree is made final, and if you try to stop us—"

The other's face seemed changing, to be remodeled before his eyes. A mask of some inner feeling, of something strange and terrible that raced madly in his brain, dropped over his countenance, wiping off his look of stolid apathy and replacing it with one of positively feline fury. Something animal, not human.

He heaved himself out of his chair and laughed, not insanely, but as if at some secret only he knew. "By God, you *are* impudent!" he chuckled. "To come here tellin' me you're going to take my wife. You'd make a fine pair, you two—a molly-coddle and a woman with no more life in her than a wet firecracker—if I'd let you have each other. But I won't. Get this, you lily-livered snake. I'm goin' to beat the life out of you right here—you won't steal anybody's wife when I get through with you—"

"Keep back, Stokes!" Mayhew's eyes were mercilessly unwavering as the other lurched toward him, and his voice was low and dissonantly gritty. "You're not going to beat anybody—you're not going to interfere with Muriel or me again—ever." The lamplight glinted on the barrel of the little Belgian automatic he had jerked out of his jacket pocket. "You're a big burly bully, but this'll make us equal—"

"You never saw the time you were my equal, you dam' pansy—" Stokes made a sweeping clutch for the weapon, stopped short in mid-step, hiccoughed once and started to draw a breath that stopped before he had it in.

He fell disjointedly, clumsily, as if he had stumbled over his own feet, and his big strong body seemed to collapse in upon itself as if his spirit were no longer sufficiently interested to keep its contours filled out.

It was very quiet in the room; quiet but not noiseless; a hush filled with small sounds that blended together till they could not be noticed—the ominous, slow ticking of a clock, the faint rasp of a wind-stirred tree branch on the window pane, a man's harsh, rasping breathing, half gasp, half sob. Bill lay on his side looking scarcely more human than a bundle of old clothes

or a scarecrow that had been unceremoniously dropped on the floor. There was no longer anger in his face, nor any trace of passion. There was only blankness. All expression and all life had drained out of his countenance. He was just a relic now, his life a closed and finished book.

HE HADN'T had a chance at the trial. The record in the divorce case was introduced, Muriel had testified on cross-examination that the quarrel that led to her beating and their separation was over him. A dozen people testified that they had been together almost constantly since his return. Every kiss they had exchanged at meeting and parting was duly recorded. "Gentlemen of the jury, not content with carrying on a correspondence with the deceased's wife, with sending her presents and alienating her affections from her husband, this man went brazenly and shamelessly to keep appointments with her, exchanged embraces with her in public while the decree of divorce—a decree that might never have been made final, mark you—was still pending. Not content with all this, I say, he deliberately and with premeditated malice sought the injured husband out, provoked a quarrel and shot him dead!" the state's attorney bellowed. "He says he fired in self-defense. God save the mark! Why did he go to see the man he had so greatly wronged—why did he go to call on William Stokes armed with a deadly weapon if not with murder in his heart and the cold-blooded intention to commit murder in his brain?"

She had called on him that afternoon, "the woman in the case," dogged by reporters and photographers who followed her right to the prison doors and waited avidly as wolves for her to emerge. "Please, *please,*" she begged the guard who sat outside the death cell, "oh, please take the screen away a moment. I—I want so to kiss him good-by!"

The man looked undecided, cast a furtive glance up the corridor, then, sudden resolution forming on his long, immobile face, unlatched the fastenings of the wire net that swung before the barred door of the cell. "Be quick, lady," he admonished in a hoarse whisper. "It's agin th' regulations—"

Although the steel bars intervened they clung and kissed, arms circled round each other, lips and hearts together in a final long farewell. "I love you, Bob," she whispered almost soundlessly. "I love you. Will that help—"

"Help?" A seraphic smile broke on his tired, lined face. "Help? Oh, my darling, when I walk that little way tonight I'll *feel* your love surrounding me; feel the pressure of your hand in mine to give me courage—"

"And you'll wait for me, dearest?"

"Wait?" The question puzzled him.

"Yes, darling, yes! There may—I don't know that there is, nobody does—but there's a chance there may be something after this life. Say that if there is you'll wait for me, stretch out your hand to help me over—"

"To a land of pure and filmy spirits?" he answered ironically. "Where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but only bloodless, abstract life without sensation, with no hands to clasp, no lips to kiss—"

"Perhaps," her hurried words broke in. "Perhaps it is like that. Perhaps it's just an everlasting, dreamless sleep, but if there *is* a life and consciousness there, promise that you'll wait for me. I'd rather be with you through all eternity as a pale shade than share a full life with another."

"Time's up, lady," the keeper cautioned. "I gotta put th' screen back. If they ketch me—"

"Now," Mayhew gasped as his arms tightened around her shoulders, "one last kiss, dearest, then good-by. I'll close my

eyes and stop my ears so I can't see or hear you leaving, and when I open them again you'll be gone, but I'll have the memory of your lips on mine when—when—"

"My dear, my *dear!*" she moaned and stopped his words with burning kisses.

Then he had sat with head bowed, elbows on knees, knuckles pressed against his lips, not crying, but staring dry-eyed straight ahead as though he could already glimpse the long vistas of eternity. The prison barber had come to shave a small tonsure on his head and slit his trousers leg with his shears. "Half an hour," the chaplain had said. . . .

"All right, son," the warden stood at the cell door. "This is it." He drew a folded paper from his pocket, began reading: "The Governor . . . to Leslie Simpson, warden, greetings. These are to command you that . . . you cause the sentence of the law to be executed on the body of Robert Mayhew . . . and this shall be your warrant. . . ."

The chaplain, looking as if he were about to be sick, opened his black-bound book: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . . yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death . . ."*

They were walking, not fast, but not slowly, toward the end of the corridor. Terrifying in its very commonplaceness was a solid metal door, wide enough for three people to pass abreast, grained and painted in imitation of golden oak. SILENCE proclaimed the legend on its lintel. To right and left were prison guards who held his elbows lightly. Another guard brought up the rear. *". . . I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me . . ."*

They led him to the chair but he did not seem to see it. They had to help him up the one low step—his last step in the world—or he would have stumbled on it.

Hands fumbled over him. Someone seized his leg, turned back the slit trouser from his calf. A leather belt was latched across his stomach, straps were buckled on his wrists, his ankles. The leather headpiece was drawn down across his eyes and everything went dark. But he could hear and feel. Feel the cold electrode on his leg, feel the moistened sponge against the shaved spot on his head, feel the straps that bound him to the chair. A watch ticked stridently in the silence, cutting through the heavy, panting breathing of the guards, the chaplain muttered almost inarticulately. *"Out of the depths have I called unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice . . ."*

It was as if a dreadful cramp had seized him, not alone in limbs and stomach, but in every nerve and muscle and tendon. His body seemed to swell and bloat and distend till it was ten times too big for his skin. A roaring like the roll of thunder deafened him and a million brightly colored lights were flashing in his eyes. Then suddenly a vast, outrageous crash in his brain—and darkness.

But the darkness lifted slowly. Before his closed eyes glowed a dull violet light, growing brighter by degrees until it seemed shot through with golden spots and flashes. He seemed to grope his way across an endless set of obstacles, creeping painfully back to consciousness. Every muscle in his body ached like an ulcerated tooth. He grasped at consciousness again, heard the watch-tick, now magnified until it sounded like the beating of a frantic hammer on an anvil, caught the mumbling voice of the chaplain—*"My soul fleeth unto the Lord, before the morning watch . . ."* Then once again the roaring, the dazzling lights, the unendurable torment of cramping. . . . A faint moan pushed past the blued lips beneath the leather mask, a shuddering tremor ran through the form in the chair as it dropped back from straining against the straps. Then it was still.

He seemed to be in a land of gray mists. The air was thick with brume, a

sort of gray, translucent fog that neither moved nor shifted, yet did not quite shut out vision. He could see a little way around him but, except for fleeting glimpses, could see nothing further than ten yards or so. The land was flat and seemed to stretch away to an uncertain misty horizon. There was no sound, no breath of stirring air, just colorless gray fog and desolate, uncolored, flat landscape. Then for just the twinkling of an eye the mist parted and in the far distance, clear cut and minute as something seen through a reversed opera glass, he caught a transient view of what looked like a city, a collection of tall towers and rounded domes that shone with scintillating splendor in a blaze of light that was not quite sunshine nor yet moonlight, but a glorious effulgence such as he had never seen or imagined.

He caught his breath in amazed awe. What was it—where was he?

A dog's sharp, joyous bark sounded, and in an instant something small and black and very full of life, a Scottish terrier, dashed up and leaped upon him as if it had known him always and was welcoming him home. And then another dog came running from the shadows, a splendid English setter with a blaze of white on its red forehead and soft, affectionate brown eyes. It too leaped on him with a joyous yelp of welcome, and he patted the black and red heads fondly. "Good boy—good dog! I don't know who you are or where you came from, but I'm as glad to see you as you seem to see me."

The dogs at last ceased their demonstrative greeting and trotted off before him, stopping now and then to look back as if to ask, "Aren't you coming?"

Why not? They seemed to know their way and he was a stranger . . . could this be hell or heaven, or what? From infancy he'd been taught that dogs had no souls. Except for the Mohammedans and a few obscure cults every creed denied them immortality. And yet . . .

"Tammie, John o' Gaunt, have you found him?"

The voice was like a strain of music, striking back responsive chords of incredulous joy in his heart. Muriel! In this place—

"Can't you find him, boys?" the hail came again from the fog, and Mayhew called back, his voice jubilant:

"Muriel—beloved!"

"Bobbie, darling—where are you?"

"Coming, dearest," he called back. "The dogs are leading me."

She came to him out of the fog, eyes alight with love and tenderness, both hands outstretched to him. "My dear, my dearest dear, I was afraid I'd missed you!"

He took her hands in his and looked into her eyes. "How—why are you here, beloved?"

"Heart's dearest, did you think I'd stay when you had gone away?" she asked almost reproachfully.

"You—you mean you—"

"Yes," she nodded. "It didn't hurt much. Only, when I realized I was drowning, I fought a little, but the struggle didn't last long, and—" she paused, her face transfigured by her love as by a halo—"we're together, dearest one. Not for time, but for eternity."

Then they were in each other's arms, so naturally, so tenderly that the quiet ecstasy of it was almost appalling.

And as her soft sweet lips found his and clung he knew that all his doubts and fears had been groundless.

There was another life, and there was consciousness and feeling and sensation in it, with hands to clasp and lips to kiss. . . .

When ancient wizards foretold the future they read it in the blood and insides of horses!

Hoofs

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

SOME suggest that the Countess Monteseco was born Sharon Hill, of American parents, and got her title by an ill-advised marriage abroad; that the Count, her husband, was a rank bad man, and that the world and the Countess were better for his death. Nobody knows surely, except John Thunstone, who evinces a great talent of reticence. Yet some suggest . . .

Heading by ELTON FAX

The Countess, at the telephone in her drawing room, directed that the caller waiting in the hotel lobby be sent up. She was compactly, blondely handsome, neither doll nor siren, with a broad brow, an arched nose, and eyes just darker than sapphires. Today she wore blue silk, and no jewelry except a heart-shaped brooch of gold.

The caller appeared, smallish and plumpish, with lips that smiled and eyes as bright and expressionless as little lamps. At her gesture he sat in an armchair, his pudgy fingertips together.

"Your name is Hengist?" prompted the Countess, glancing at a note on her desk. "Yes? You sent me this message, about —certain articles I lost in Europe."

"About your husband," amended Hengist. "He loves you."

The sapphire eyes threw sparks. "That's a clumsy lie or a clumsy joke. My husband died years ago."

"But he loves you," murmured Hengist. "What blue eyes you have! And your hair is like a tawny, mellow wine they make in Slavic countries. Your husband cannot be blamed for loving you."

She shook her head. "He hated me."

"Death works many changes. Look at me. I know much about you, and about your husband. As life is to the living, so death is to the dead. Love can exist and thrive after a body's death. It lives with your husband. . . ."

His voice fell to a cadenced drone. She rose to her feet, and so did Hengist. He was no taller than she, and strangely graceful for all his plumpness. He cocked a questioning caterpillar eyebrow.

"I dislike mysteries and conjuring tricks," said the Countess. "Keep your hypnotism for morons. Good-by, Mr. Hengist."

"Your husband loves you," repeated Hengist. "I know, and so does—Rowley Thorne." He smiled as he flinched. "You look pale. Rowley Thorne once frightened and angered you, but you know that his knowledge and practise of enchantment is genuine. Suppose he proved that your husband, who was dead—lived again?"

"Lived?" echoed the Countess. "Physically?"

"Yes. But—in another body. Rowley Thorne will show you." He moved a little closer. "Maybe I could show you something, too. About this love we have been discussing."

She slapped him. He turned and departed.

In the lobby, he entered a telephone booth and dialed a number.

"Thorne," he said to the voice that answered, "I carried out instructions. She did as you predicted."

"Splendid," replied the voice, deep and triumphant. "She believes."

SHARON, COUNTESS MONTESECO, did believe.

Alone, she called herself an idiot to accept fantasies; but Hengist had spoken of Rowley Thorne. If Rowley Thorne could raise dread evil spirits—and she had seen him do it—he could raise the spirit of Count Monteseco. The Count alive, in another body of his own; if that was true, what must she do? Would the Count claim her. Was he still selfish and cruel? John Thunstone had always called those traits the unforgiveable sins. If she had not had that disagreement with John Thunstone, a disagreement over trifles which wound up a quarrel . . . the telephone was ringing, and she took up the receiver.

"Aren't we being childish?" John Thunstone's voice asked.

She borrowed strength from her pride. "Perhaps one of us is. You worked hard to say painful things, John."

"You didn't have to work hard to say them. Sharon, I've a plane reservation, to go a considerable distance and dig into un-

pleasant mysteries with Judge Pursuivant. But I'd rather call it off, and take you to a pleasant dinner."

"I—I've a headache, John." Even as she spoke, it was true. A dull throb crawled inside her skull.

"I see." He sounded weary. "Good-by, Sharon. Sorry."

He hung up. The Countess sank into a chair. John Thunstone could have helped —would have helped. Why had she avoided seeing him, when something strange and evil was on the way to happen to her? Had that larval little Hengist hypnotized her enough to make her banish her friends? For John Thunstone was a friend. He was more than that, and she had rebuffed him, and now he'd fly away, she did not know where or for how long.

Downstairs in the lobby, a big man in a dark gray suit left the house telephone. His eyes half-narrowed, and under his small black mustache his lips clamped. John Thunstone had humbled himself to offer peace. It had been refused. Well, just time enough to go home, pack, taxi to the airport.

But then he saw someone emerge from a telephone booth opposite. The man was small and plump, and purposeful as he hurried away. John Thunstone's eyes lost their vexed bafflement, showed recognition.

He entered the same booth, almost coffin-snug for his huge frame. He telephoned to cancel his plane reservation.

ROWLEY THORNE'S garments just missed being seedy, and his linen could have been cleaner. But he strode from the elevator to the door of Countess Monteseco's suite with a confidence that was regal. He was almost as tall as John Thunstone, and burlier. His features showed broad, hawklike, but here and there were slackening. His great skull was bald, or perhaps shaven, and he had no eyebrows or even lashes to fringe his deep, gunmetal eyes.

He knocked, and inside she ran to the door. She opened it, and a smile of welcome died quickly on her face.

"I'm not who you expected," said Rowley Thorne.

She drew herself up. "I expected no one. Go away."

"You hoped for someone, then. And I'll go, but you'll go with me."

She began to close the door, then paused. "Why?"

"Because your husband has a message for you. . . . Surely you aren't going to flatter me by fearing me?"

"I fear nothing," said Countess Monteseco proudly. "Fear is folly, for people like you to feed on."

"Since you fear nothing, you will come."

"But you're lying about my husband."

His naked head bowed. "If I lie, come and prove it." He turned to go. "Have you a coat?"

He walked along the hallway. Halfway to the elevator, he paused. The Countess came from her room and fell into step beside him, looking never at him, but ahead.

In a taxi, she looked at him.

"No, I have no fear," she said. "Only curiosity. Why are you trying to impress and amaze me?"

"Because you have things I need. Strength and serenity."

""Strength!" She made herself laugh briefly over that. "I thought you were satisfied with your own enchantments, that you needed nothing."

The great bald head shook again. "What enchantment I know and practise I won most painfully and sorrowfully. I swore to renounce personal possessions and affections. And I did." His voice grew dully soft, just for once. "I lost every cent and stick of property that I owned, in tragic ways that made the loss more bitter. My heart—and it truly ached for love—was

torn and anguished, when death took some that I loved, and others turned false or scornful. I paid: why shouldn't I value the commodity I bought?" Now he smiled again. "I have words that some day will be known to all minds, and a will to impose upon all wills. Not world domination, Countess—that's so flat and outworn an idea. I shan't bore you with my own concept of volition and right and profit. But let me assure you of this: I have a will concerning you, and I want your will to be the same. Then neither of us will defeat the other, eh?"

She kept her eyes on mean side streets that flitted by. He continued: "Any living being is a storehouse of power. A sturdy being can give physical strength, a creature of spirit can give spiritual strength. I mean no compliments, only solemn truth when I say that your own spirit is worth my effort, for the profit I can draw from it."

"You plan some sort of sacrifice. I don't think you'll succeed, Mr. Thorne."

"Some day," he sighed, "the world will know me by a name of my own choosing, a name of mastery. Once I tried to draw you into my plans. Your friend Thunstone helped you beat me. Being beaten does not suit me. The experience must be wiped out."

"I see," she said. "Your belief, or worship, or philosophy, or whatever it is, cannot accept failure."

"Exactly," nodded Thorne.

"I don't fear you in the least."

"That's a valiant lie. But you won't try to escape, for you refuse to accept failure, too—and running from me would be failure."

The taxi stopped. Rowley Thorne opened the door and helped her out. They entered the lobby of an aging apartment building.

A porter in a grubby uniform gazed at them, but said nothing. Thorne led the Countess into an automatic elevator, and pressed the button. They rode twenty floors upward in silence.

Stepping forth into a hall, they mounted half a dozen steps to an entry above. The door opened before Thorne could knock. Hengist stood there, smiling.

"All ready," he reported to Thorne.

"Come," said Thorne to the Countess. They entered a room with drawn blinds. There was no furniture except a small table of Oriental lacquer, on which stood some article the size of a teapot, covered loosely with a napkin.

The Countess paused inside the door. "You sent word that my husband would be here, alive."

Thorne shook his head. "No," he demurred. "I said he would be here in a living body. Not necessarily human, not necessarily even flesh and blood. He is here."

He lifted the napkin from the object on the table.

IT GAVE light, or she thought it gave light. Apparently it was made of glass, with an inner substance that glowed dimly, like foxfire.

"Look closely," Rowley Thorne bade her.

It was supported on four legs, like a tiny article of furniture. A doll's chair of glass. No. Crudely but forcefully it was shaped to resemble an animal. The straight legs were vigorously planted, the body was rounded and strong, the head long and supported on a neck that arched. Two blobs of glass made upthrust ears.

"It's a toy horse," pronounced the Countess. "I think you're wasting our time."

"No toy," Thorne assured her. "Touch it."

She reached out to pick it up, but almost flung it down. Stepping back, she chafed her hands together. "It's warm," she said shakily. "Like—like—"

"Like blood?" prompted Hengist, smiling in the dimness.

"Like a living body," amended Thorne. "A spirit you know lives inside. What you see is an old, old image, sacred once to a cult that has vanished. That cult knew ways to locate and imprison ghosts. Inside the horse is all that made Count Monteseco the kind of man he was."

Both Hengist and Thorne were watching her. She forced herself to touch the horse of glass a second time. Having touched it, she forced herself not to shudder.

"You want me to believe that this phosphorescence is a soul?"

"It has been kept thus so as to convince you. The Count, as I learned, was just such a soul as might be expected to remain wretchedly near the place of his death. A European colleague used spells to snare that soul, and sent it to me. The container is designed for the single purpose of keeping it until—"

"Why a horse?" she asked.

"Horses are exceptional creatures. They are strong, intelligent, full of emotion and spirit.

Remember the kelpie, the *puka,* and Pegasus and the others. There have been horse gods in Norway, Spain, Russia, Greece, even in tropical America. When German wizards foretold the future, they read it in the blood and bowels of horses." Thorne looked from the glass image to the Countess. "Speak to your husband's soul."

"Do you really expect me—"

"I'll show you how." His bald head stooped above the dim-glowing little shape of glass. "You within, do you know this woman?"

The phosphorescence whirled, as vapor whirls in a breeze. The glass head stirred, moved. It lifted, and sagged back.

"You see," said Thorne, "it nodded affirmation."

"Nonsense!" she protested, but her voice almost broke. "That was an optical illusion, or some piece of stage magic."

"Touch it again. Assure yourself that it is a solid, unjointed glass structure. . . . Satisfied? I'll question it again: The woman is your Countess?"

Another nod.

"You—love her?"

Yet again the glass head dipped.

"I still say it's a trick," said the Countess. "Why I came here I don't know."

"You've forgotten? Wasn't there something said about not being afraid? You came, Countess, to scorn me and to conquer me. You felt that you must show how strong and fearless you could be without John Thunstone. And it's not a trick. Lift the thing. Don't be afraid. Make sure that there are no threads or levers or other mechanism. Now look into it. Deep into it."

SHE felt a flash of pain, as if the subdued glow were too bright for her eyes, but she stared where the radiance was strongest, in the midst of the horse's body. For a moment it seemed as though an eye floated there to return her gaze, an eye she had known and had never expected to see again. The warmth of the glass communicated itself to her hands. She felt, or fancied she felt, a rhythmic pulsing from within the figure.

"Now, questions that only your husband could answer," urged Thorne.

She addressed the object: "If you are who they say you are, you will remember the words I spoke at our last parting."

The glass shape shifted in her hands. Thoughts formed in the depths of her mind, but not thoughts of her own. Those thoughts answered her question:

I remember. You said you would tolerate cruelty, but not lies.

She shuddered and swayed. Rowley Thorne took the figure from her and set it back on the table.

"You believe now, don't you?" he challenged her. "That, I say, is why I kept the soul of your Count in this strange condition—to convince you. Now it shall be transmigrated, to the body of a man. I look forward to an interesting reunion between you and him."

"I'll submit to no more extravagances," she was able to protest.

"Hengist," said Thorne, "take the Countess Monteseco to the observatory."

Hengist laid his hand upon her wrist. When she tried to pull away, he tightened his grip cunningly. Agony swelled along her arm. She had to go with him. He urged her up another flight of stairs.

This second story of the penthouse was a single room, with windows all around. Twilight was coming to the city outside and below. Hengist smiled as he shut the door behind him.

"You came here partially out of bravado, and partly out of adroit suggestion," he said. "Now the bravado is gone, and the suggestion is going. If you are convinced that your husband lives again, in human flesh, will you be bound to him by vows or sentiments?"

He turned the key in the lock. She drew herself up, pale and angry.

"I thought I was a free agent. Why do you lock me in?"

"Because you are shrugging off the last flimsy bond of suggestion. Because you must stay here and see your husband again in the flesh."

She looked around. "In what body—"

"Here," and Hengist placed a pudgy hand on his chest. "I am the body."

She sat down in an armchair. Hengist fumbled in a pocket, and brought out a slim vial. It, too, had something phosphorescent inside.

"I am instructed," he told her, "to drink this concoction and prepare myself to receive a new spirit, that will dominate and replace my own. But," he paused, smiling sidelong at her. "Why don't we throw it away?"

"Throw it away?"

"Yes, and not be parties to the revival of the Count's life in my body. Keep me just Hengist. I'm Thorne's associate and servitor. He intends, by supernatural means, to house within me the spirit of Count Monteseco. Then you will be constrained and subdued, by use of that spirit in a living body. Your money, for one thing, will become Thorne's. And there are other ways he will triumph over you and your friends."

The Countess remembered that Thorne had spoken of his need for triumph where he had failed.

"Wouldn't you rather have me as Hengist than as Count Monteseco?" Hengist asked again. "I find you attractive. Attractive enough, in fact, to make me wish to stay myself for your sake. What do you think? But think quickly. Because Rowley Thorne will be coming."

ON THE floor below, Rowley Thorne opened a closet. From shelves inside he brought out a walking stick of jointed bamboo, marked in Japanese characters, and a tarnished bronze lamp. This he lighted, and it shed yellow light, dimming the glow within the glass figure as he placed it and the cane upon the table. While he moved and arranged the objects, he kept up a swift, indistinct mutter in a language that could be neither Latin or Greek, but which fell into cadences and rhymes, like some sort of ritual. After a moment he paused, looked around, and brought a dish out of the closet. Into it he threw white powder and red, and tilted the dish to mingle them. Finally he bit his thumb savagely, and dripped blood from it upon the mingled powder.

"That," said a quiet voice, "is one of the most disgusting commonplaces of your dirty ceremonies."

From behind a window-drape slid the broad shoulders and scornful face of John Thunstone.

Rowley Thorne faced him, his own lips writhing back from big, pointed teeth.

"She has rejected you and your help," he snarled. "I know it. I know all about your quarrel. She didn't want you, or she'd have sent for you. Get out."

Thunstone took a step closer. "The Countess, like many women, is not utterly sure what she does want. I followed your little jackal, Hengist, here. Magic of my own—a skeleton key—let me in by a side door. And I listened. I know everything—to stay within the melodramatic pattern you seem to set, I should say that I know all." He took another step. "Since you're so nervous about the Countess's feelings, be glad that I waited until she left to settle with you."

"Get out," said Thorne again. He picked up the cane.

"Spoiling the preparations for your incantation," Thunstone said, in a voice of friendly warning. "I know about this kind of thing, too. How does the little jibber-jabber go? 'He whose dead ghost has no caretaker is looking for a shelter from the night; and who speaks the Black Name, and speaks it now—' "

"Silence!" bawled Thorne. "You'll ruin—"

Thunstone eyed the collection on the table. "That would be a collector's item, yonder. Etruscan, I take it—the Equine Cult of Aradonia. May I look?" He put out a hand.

Thorne threw himself between the table and Thunstone. The cane lifted in his hand and struck at Thunstone's head. The big man dodged sidewise, caught at the cane and pulled.

But the wood seemed to give in his hand, to slide easily away. Thorne was clearing a narrow steel blade from within it. He laughed once, a sharp laugh like the bark of a fox. Thunstone held a hollow length of cane that had served as sheath for the blade.

"I should have done this long ago," said Thorne, and fell on guard like a fencer. He lunged, speeding his point full at Thunstone's throat.

But Thunstone parried with the hollow cane he held, let the point slither out of line, then struck sharply at Thorne's weapon hand. Wood rang on knuckles, and Thorne dropped his blade with a curse. Thunstone caught it up, breaking it across his knee.

"You'd have found my murder difficult to explain," he said.

Thorne struck at him with his fist, and Thunstone took the blow high on his head. He weaved a little, but countered with both hands, to Thorne's head and body. Thorne staggered back against the table. It toppled.

Something crashed.

Thorne wailed as if his arm had broken. Thunstone moved across the room and snapped a light switch. Turning, he saw Thorne kneeling, almost in tears.

"Yes, yes," Thunstone murmured, as if to soothe him. "The collector's item is gone. Smashed. And what was inside—"

"Do you realize what this means?" jabbered Thorne, rising.

Thunstone nodded. "Perfectly. The captive soul is free—with no prepared haven. Your ceremony had not begun. Count Monteseco undergoes no reincarnation.

"But the ceremony had begun," Thorne insisted. "I'd spoken some of the words—I'd pointed the way to Hengist."

"Ah," said Thunstone. "And if Hengist isn't prepared, that is Hengist's misfortune." He eyed his adversary appraisingly. "Once more, Thorne, I'm leaving you in an embarrassing position."

"You are a stubborn creature," Hengist was saying. "One would think you

actually preferred to be the wife of the Count, and the slave of Rowley Thorne. Well, suppose I don't allow it? Suppose I move for your good, and mine, against his magic? He'll never know that I don't house the soul he sent me, and I can watch for a proper time to— What are you staring at?"

"The transom," said the Countess. "Something moved there."

"The transom's as tight shut as this door." Hengist's fat forefinger twiddled the key in its lock. "Not even Rowley Thorne could enter, unless he got a Hand of Glory somewhere on short notice. Now then, to assume? Even if you find me repulsive, you might become accustomed to me later. But what's the matter with the transom now?"

"Something moved there," she said again.

"A shadow," Hengist offered loftily.

"But it has eyes—and it shines—"

Something drifted through the closed door, as fog drifts through gauze.

Hengist goggled, backed up, and whimpered. The cloud of dead-glowing vapor billowed, churned, and abruptly lengthened. Its fore part lifted. It was shaping itself, dimly and roughly, into a form that reared, a form with a long tossing head, an arched neck, and lean forelimbs with lumpy extremities.

Hengist's whine shrilled into a scream. He tried to get away, but floundered into a corner. Those forelegs came down upon him, and he fell, and the great shining cloud was upon him.

Then the Countess remembered that the key was in the lock. She unfastened the door and ran for the stairs. She might have fallen down them, but John Thunstone was coming up and caught her.

As far as she could remember later, he did not speak then or for quite a while afterward. He shepherded her to the elevator, out into the street, and home in a taxi.

He did not even say good-night.

The next day, when he took her to lunch, he came as close as he would ever come to discussing the adventure. "The papers," he remarked, "are interested in a man who was found dead in a penthouse. Because he seems to have been beaten all over by heavy, blunt weapons. The police say it's as if a horse had trampled him to death."

Then he gave his attention to ordering the soup.

The Shoes of Judge Nichols

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Heading by ELTON FAX

I DO not know what was behind it all. It was simply "one of those things" that do happen, and leave you wondering all your life. It came upon me as suddenly as an avalanche—and, even now, I am stunned when I think of it. The nearest I have ever come to an explanation is that it was due to the great

People scoff at psychic possession—when some outside conscious force is said to occupy a human body—but there's no arguing with a fact!

force of my desire; that by wishing very strongly, I caused a psychic dislocation, a release of energy, a conversion of the thinking, fee ing part of me into that accursed—

But I anticipate. Let me tell, as nearly as I can, just what occurred, in the hope that the reader, more versed in these affairs than I, will be able to account for my uncanny experience.

My name is Ben Cummings; by trade I am a taxicab driver. I believe I am as good at my work as the next man; but, somehow, I was never able to get ahead—never able to accumulate much money. One reason was Judge Sampson Nichols, who runs the traffic court in our city. Five separate times that devil sentenced me, for speeding, passing red lights, and other violations. The last time he plastered on a fine of an even hundred, and added the warning, "The next offense, young man, and it'll be jail for you!" As I saw the judge glaring down at me—sleek-looking as a polished red apple, with his round rosy face, green-blue eyes, and well-tailored suit that cost more than I earn in a week of Sundays—well, then I clenched my fists and felt ready to slash his throat. "God!" I thought. "How I'd like to be in his shoes!"

I remember expressing this idea that evening to Mona as we were on the way to the movies—Mona is my girl, you know, and we are going to be married as soon as I can save enough to fit out a home. "Well, if you had any spunk," she flashed back at me, screwing up those little eyes of hers until they seemed to hit me like a pair of hard bright rods, "you'd do something to put yourself in his shoes, instead of letting him soak you with hundred-dollar fines! How we ever going to get married if this keeps on?"

I guess I must have brooded over these words. I knew all about Judge Nichols, I thought—he lived in a grand mansion up on Overlook Heights. More than once I've driven a fare to his place, which had grilled iron gates, with a granite lion on each side. It looked like a million dollars to me. If a man could live like the judge, I thought, he would be happier than a king!"

And didn't I have as much right to happiness as that glib, sermonizing tyrant of the Traffic Court?

THIS thought kept preying on my mind all night. For hours I couldn't sleep; I kept seeing that damnable judge's face: his head greying at the temples, and turning bald at the peak; his big fleshy nose, with a little red bulb at the end; and the sharp, downturning lines of his lips. I still saw him, like some one who was with me in the room, when I dropped off at last into a doze. Then I had the most hideous dreams, as if I went through a long tussle in the dark; and when I awoke, it was with a jolt, as if somebody had slapped me on the head.

"By glory!" I cried, jumping up with a start, for there was a blinding sunlight in the room. "I've overslept! I'll be late to work!"

But as I pulled myself out of bed and blinked in the strong light, something very strange hit me right between the eyes. In fact, many strange things! So many that I fell back again among the covers, and started to pinch myself, thinking I must be dreaming.

"Jesus! Who has kidnapped me?" I wondered. For this wasn't my two-by-four hall bedroom, with its one dingy window looking out on a brick court. Four windows stared down upon me—beautifully curtained, and with the sun pouring through them. I was impressed by the size of the place, the costly maple furniture, the elegant decorated lamps. Almost at the same time, I realized that I was dressed in silk pajamas—the first I had

ever worn in all my life! And I hardly recognized my hands, which seemed shorter, chubbier, fatter, and had lost their seams and scars. They were like the hands of somebody else!

So many impressions crowded over me that all I could do was to gasp and groan.

But I had scarcely uttered a sound when a lady's voice came from the next room. It was high-pitched, and about as pleasant to hear as a rusty axle. "Sam! For goodness' sake, be more quiet! Don't you know I've got a headache?"

My own head was in such a whirl that I slipped, and came banging down to the floor—at which a door to my right popped half open, letting in a glimpse of a pajamaed form and a hawk-nosed face with the long hair hanging untidily about it.

"Sam! Have you been drinking again?" squeaked that same voice as before. "If you're not more considerate, I'll get out of the house! And this time I won't come back, no matter what the scandal, you damned white-livered gutter rat!"

The door closed with a bang, and I went staggering about the room, too bewildered to imagine what had happened, but blankly examining various objects, like a stranger in a foreign land. Where was I?

Who was this horrible woman? Why did she address me as "Sam"? These were the questions that flung themselves dully at my numbed brain. . . . Then all at once, with the suddenness of a shot, I was struck with the greatest surprise of all.

I had reached the full-length mirror just opposite the entrance to a rose-tiled bathroom. And I happened to glance into the glass, and what I saw made me reel, and sink down in a state near to collapse.

It was not my own image that stared back at me—not the young lean features, with the gray eyes and pale complexion. It was another face—and also a familiar one! It was rounded and reddish, and had green-blue eyes, hair that was turning gray at the temples, a bald peak of a head, and a big fleshy nose, with a little red bulb at the end!

THERE is a point at which surprise ends, and at which, in a dazed sort of way, one accepts any miracle. I had about reached this point when I saw that face in the mirror. The mouth gaped at me with amazement that, I knew, matched my own; every movement, every grimace, was timed to a movement, a grimace on my part. There was only one explanation: somehow or other, I had entered another man's body Yes, the body of my old enemy, Judge Nichols!

Now I had heard of cases of "psychic possession," when some outside conscious force is said to occupy a human body, in place of its proper owner. It seems to me that I had also read of "split" or "multiple" personalities, which are written up in all the psychology books, and which some authors try to explain as "psychic possession." But, of course, I had never taken any stock in such nonsense. However, there is no arguing with a fact. And here, certainly, was the fact that the judge's face looked out at me from the mirror!

While I stood there in a stunned way, wondering how I was going to get back into my own body, the door to my right burst open again, and that awful hawk-nosed woman came in, like a redskin on the war-path. She was wearing a lavender dressing gown, but, even so, I could see that her build was about as flabby as an egg without its shell.

"What's the matter with you, you dummy, standing there like a wooden block?" she squealed at me. "Why don't you get a move on, take your bath and shave, and go down to breakfast? Don't you know you've got to get to court today?"

Somehow, there was something about her that cowed me. Ordinarily I am not a

meek man; and yet I answered, in tones like a feather duster:

"O. K., ma'am."

She glared at me as if she had been hit. "O. K., ma'am?" she flung back, projecting her sharp little chin forward like a sword-thrust. "Since when are you getting so slangy, my dear man? And if you think you can gain anything by your sarcasm, you're badly mistaken! I suppose you've forgotten my name!"

With that, she turned haughtily away. You can bet I was relieved to see her go! How could I tell her that I had not forgotten her name, since I never even knew it?

However, I decided to make the best of things as I found them, and try to live the judge's life until I discovered some way of getting out of it.

As I entered the bathroom for a warm shower, I made some new discoveries. The first was that I couldn't move with anything like my old spryness. My limbs seemed heavy, and a bit rusty, and just wouldn't work right; also, there was a sort of catch in my left calf. Worst of all, however, was the pain that shot through my face just after I turned on the cold water in the shower. Good heavens! I had never in all my life felt anything like it! It was enough to bend me nearly double. I didn't know yet that it was only neuralgia, but I began to see that life in Judge Nichols' shoes wouldn't be all clover.

After a time, the pain went away, and I dressed in the sleekest suit I had ever put on, though it was a little tight about my waist, which bulged considerably. Then I shaved with my first electric shaver; and was just wondering where to go for breakfast when I heard a bell ringing, and a voice yelled up at me, "Judge Nichols! Telephone! Telephone!"

At first I didn't recognize that this meant me. And when I did take notice, I didn't see the extension telephone on the dressing table; and Mrs. Hawk-Nose, happening to come up, screamed at me, "My God, Sam, losing your wits? Don't you see that phone there? Can't you hear it ringing?"

As I snapped up the receiver, I wasn't exactly in a mood for a conversation.

"Hello!" I barked.

"Hello!" answered a husky voice. "Guess you know who this is."

"How in hell do I know?"

The voice seemed considerably subdued. "It's me—Everett."

"Ever who?" I roared.

"Everett—Everett, Dad!"

That "Dad" pretty nearly bowled me over. It was my first realization that I had a son!

"I'm in trouble, Dad," he went on. "It's a deuced bad predicament—well, since it's got to come out anyway, I might as well let on it's that same chorus girl again. Can you send me down two hundred right away—"

"Go to the devil!" I yelled and banged the receiver back into place, feeling that this was no time to bother a newly made parent.

But I didn't get out of it so easily. I had a long session with old Hawk-Nose, who said I was never fair to "poor dear Everett," and swore I had promised only last week to "give him another chance."

I don't know when she would have ended her tirade, if she hadn't happened to notice the suit I was wearing. "God Almighty, you've got on your old clothes!" she screamed at me—and you would have thought I had killed somebody. "They've got to go to the cleaners! Good Lord, but you're getting neglectful! Now hurry, and change—breakfast is getting cold!"

By the time I had gone down to the breakfast room, after almost getting lost on the way, I wasn't in much of a mood for eating. On coming in, I was surprised to see a stunning girl of about nineteen, who greeted me with a cheery, "Morning, Dad!"

It was quite a revelation to find myself twice a parent, even though I still didn't know my daughter's name!

That breakfast was an ordeal. I couldn't stand the sauerkraut juice they had put out for me; though Hawk-Nose seemed scandalized when I refused it. "Why, it's the doctor's prescription!" she hissed at me. As for the decaffeined coffee substitute—it was like [illegible] medicine, though I managed to gulp it down, after losing a tussle to get more than one lump of sugar. In the same way, she would only let me have one piece of toast. "Doctor's orders! You can't let that diabetes get the best of you!" I began to see that living with Hawk-Nose was worse than being in a straitjacket.

But when breakfast was over, I began to feel a little better. My daughter—Gloria was her name—came over and put her arms around my neck. Even though I knew it was because she wanted something from me, it was very pleasant to be treated so familiarly by such a fine-looking girl. "Oh, Dad," she cooed, "I wonder, couldn't you do me a favor?"

"What is it, darling?" I asked, regretting that I was nothing but her father.

"Well, dearest," she said, —and I could see that she was hesitating,—"you know Ronald. The poor boy was given a ticket again last night. He was driving me back from that Phi Beta reception, and they said he was speeding, but I'll swear he wasn't doing a mile over sixty. Most likely he'll be coming up in your court today. Try not to be too hard on him, won't you, dearest?"

Though I was beginning to feel a little jealous of Ronald, there was no resisting my daughter's smile. "All right, darling, we'll see what I can do," I promised, taking time off to deliver her an affectionate kiss. I was beginning to wish that Mona could be a little more like Gloria.

But just at this point, the telephone rang again. Being right near it, I snapped up the receiver automatically.

"Hello!"

"Is this Judge Nichols?"

It must have been the influence of Gloria's sweet smile, but I had forgotten that I was no longer Ben Cummings. "Hell, no!" I growled back. "You've got the wrong number!"

From the other end of the line there came a voice, so clear and loud that Hawk-Nose may have heard it as she came up. "Stewed again!"

From the glance that my wife gave me, I could see that she suspected that I was worse than merely "stewed."

III

"OH, BY the way, Sam," said Hawk-Nose, "I forgot to tell you. While you were at the club last night, Geeghan's wife phoned. He's laid up with the flu—won't be in today."

"Who in tarnation is Geeghan?"

I saw my wife and daughter exchange meaningful glances.

Hawk-Nose's tone was tart as she replied:

"Forgotten that too, have you? Well, maybe you'll remember when you have to do your own driving!"

"Oh, is that all?" I tossed back, relieved to know that Geeghan was my chauffeur. "Well, I ought to be used to that by now."

Again those meaningful glances between wife and daughter. "Just listen to the man, will you!" my chief persecutor took up, acidly. "Why, don't I remember how you always grumbled driving was worse than pulling teeth!"

I could see that, no matter what I said, I would get my foot in it; and so I resolved to speak as little as possible.

But the very next minute, I went wrong again.

"Oh, listen, Sam," popped up Hawk-Nose, "on your way to court, maybe you'll step into the bank for me?"

Before I could stop it, the natural reply slipped out. "What bank?"

Hawk-Nose's response was a scream. "Now just hear that, will you? So he's forgotten what bank he has his money in! The next thing, he'll be forgetting his own head!"

And then, after a silence, "I see I can't trust you, Sam. I'd better go myself. I've got some shopping to do, anyhow."

"So have I," announced Gloria. "I'll go with you. Dad'll drive us downtown, won't you?"

"You bet I will, darling!" I agreed, returning the sweet smile she threw me.

Naturally, being women, they took a good while to get ready; and so I lounged the time away in a large room that looked like a museum, and smoked some of the Judge's best cigars—he certainly was a judge of cigars, too!

Pretty soon the maid came in, and said, "Your morning mail, sir!" and threw a whole bundle of letters into my hands. I was surprised that any one ever got so much mail, and it seemed to me I didn't have any business reading it, but then wouldn't it look funny if I didn't know what was in my own letters? So I slit the first envelope open, and it was a bill from a big department store—for hostess gowns, evening slippers, lingerie, and a lot of other junk. I tell you it made my eyes pop out of my head—came to $262.47! I began to wonder if my salary was big enough to pay such bills. And I had my answer in the next letter, which was from a law firm, and began, "Dear Sir: We have exerted every effort with the bank, but they still threaten to foreclose on your home, unless payment of delinquent interest on the mortgage is forthcoming immediately—"

This was as far as I could read. My head was reeling; I felt a terrible stab of that neuralgia running again all through my face. After all, it didn't seem fair of Judge Nichols to saddle me with his debts!

NOT feeling in a mood to look at any more letters, I got up, and started to ramble around the house, thinking it might be a good idea to learn the lay of the land. That was how I happened to hear part of a conversation, as I passed a half closed door. I really didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I just couldn't help stopping when I heard Hawk-Nose's voice.

"Gracious me, I don't know what's come over your father, Gloria. I'm worried. He's so forgetful, all of a sudden, and acts so queer—why, he's almost like a different man!"

I could have hugged my daughter when she replied, defensively, "Oh, father's really a dear." But I didn't feel quite so good when she added, "Of course, he's awfully funny—sometimes I could just burst out howling. He's *so* old-fashioned—so backward in his ideas!"

"That isn't what I mean," answered my wife, sharply. "Whoever would expect *him* to have ideas, anyhow? But did you notice, my dear, what strange answers he gives to our questions? Did you see that funny look in his eyes?—actually, as if he were somebody we didn't know at all. I'm thinking of having him consult Dr. Holstein."

"You mean—the famous brain specialist?"

I thought it about time to tiptoe away, which I did very neatly. But I was not in a happy mood when the ladies came down a few minutes later, all rigged up in furs that looked like a million dollars; and announced that they were ready to leave.

I was glad, anyhow, to get away; and when I stepped out and saw the Judge's eight-cylinder Mesmerac sedan, I felt a glow coming all over me. It was the swellest-looking buggy I had ever gotten my hands on. "Jesus!" I whistled, as I took my place at the wheel. "This car's sure one beaut of a baby!"

Hawk-Nose, who had plumped herself

down at my side, glared at me savagely.

"Why, you blockhead, have you forgotten?" she snapped. "Only last week, you said you would turn in the old tub, if the government hadn't frozen new car sales. The old tub—those were your very words!"

I didn't attempt any answer, but in order to let out my hurt feelings I stepped on the gas. We began shooting down the avenue at a mighty clip, turning curves on two wheels, and passing every car on the way. Once we halted so suddenly for a traffic signal that Hawk-Nose screamed, "My God, Sam, what's getting into you? You never drove like a wild man before! Why, you were always so cautious!"

"Still time to reform!" I flung back.

Through the mirror, I could see Gloria's surprised glance. "Gee, Dad," she approved, "you're getting almost up to date!"

But after we got into the downtown traffic, of course, we had to move like a snail.

Then, just when we were waiting for the green light at Dunston Avenue and Fifth Street, I saw a familiar face. Heaven knows what a relief that was! There amid the crowd—or, rather, at the edge of the crowd—was Mona herself, passing so near I could have reached out and touched her. Well, I certainly did raise my hat in a hurry, and let out a cheery, "Good morning!"

I don't know whether I followed it, without thinking, with my pet name for her, but I guess the word didn't get more than half out of my mouth. However, she began eyeing me with such a hard, indignant stare that I realized, all at once, what was wrong.

Why, only last night, after hearing about the hundred-dollar fine, she had said, "That damned Judge Nichols—if I could lay hands on the filthy cur, wouldn't I just like to cut his throat!" Yes, that was what she had said; and looked as if she meant it, too! And now, from the way she was glaring at me, I knew she hadn't changed her mind.

Luckily the green light went on just then. As we shot ahead, I heard Hawk-Nose's voice in my ears, as cold and cutting as an icicle. "Oh, so that's your latest choice in sweeties, is it, Sam? How lovely! But I can't say that I admire your taste. She looked very vulgar to me!"

Bell-like and amused rang out the voice of Gloria from the rear. "Oh, I wouldn't worry, if I were you, Mother! Did you see the look she threw him? Why, if a glance could kill, there'd be nothing left now but the post mortem!"

I WAS mightily relieved when I put Gloria and Hawk-Nose down in front of the Daintie-Waist Dress Shoppe, and turned out along Lafayette Avenue toward the courthouse. But if I thought my troubles were over, I was badly mistaken. I had barely reached the corner of Blackstone Street when the damned engines of that Mesmerac Eight began to sputter, and then stopped cold. I knew what was wrong, of course; and it wasn't a minute before I was out, and down under the car. I'll swear I completely forgot that I was supposed to be Judge Nichols, and not Ben Cummings! I didn't remember, either, until I had put everything to rights, and got out from under the machine. Then I noticed a black oil streak down my left trouser leg. But what the hell! I thought. It was too late now to be helped!

It did seem to me that there was a peculiar smirk on the face of a passer-by, who stopped just long enough to say, "Morning, Judge! Holy smoke, you missed your vocation! Why don't you get a job as auto repair man?"

"Guess I'm used to cars," I answered. "My old flivver of a taxi—" But then I checked myself, remembering who I was. Fixing autos was always my hobby," I

ended, lamely. But I thought the man's face had a queerer smirk than ever.

Hardly a stone's throw from the courthouse, I found a good parking place. But I was getting a little nervous, and took a stroll around the block before going in, because I wasn't sure how I'd come out in this judging business.

Just as I was getting toward the building's main entrance, a plump spectacle-wearing bigwig stepped up to me, with a cheery, "Morning, Sam!"

"Morning!" I answered, wondering if I should have called him "Fred" or "Tom" or "Bill."

"Well, old sport, how you getting along for that Antlers Club speech?" he asked, giving me a companionable slap on the back.

"Oh, I'm doing fine, old man!" I tried to act the part, although this was the first I had heard of the speech.

He had placed himself at my side, and moved slowly along with me.

"Let's see, when's she coming off?"

At first I was stumped. "Really, old pal, I've got so darned many engagements on my mind," I pleaded, after a moment, "I never can remember such things without looking up my date-book."

I thought his answering "H'm!" did not sound convinced. "Well, let's see now," he went on, taking out a notebook and pencil, "what's your topic?"

I saw that I was getting into deeper and deeper water. "Oh, my topic?" I replied, as airily as I could. "Well, tell you the truth, I haven't decided yet."

"The hell you haven't!" The man looked surprised, even startled. "Why, you know damned well, Sam, every paper in town carried mention of it!"

My only response was to look blank.

To my relief, the man started on ahead of me, as if suddenly remembering an engagement. "Well, Sam," he concluded, "guess you were enjoying the High Jinks last night! See you again when you're sober!"

Following a little distance behind, I saw him disappear up the courthouse stairs and beyond a door marked, "Warren P. Rutherford, Justice of the Superior Court."

LUCKILY, I didn't have much trouble finding the traffic court, for I had been there often enough. But what a pleasure to know that, this time, I wouldn't have to pay any fine! There were quite a number of people waiting, since I'd gotten there an hour late; and I thought they all looked at me just a little queerly as I came in. In fact, a girl in the rear started to titter, and then turned her face away in a hurry; but I thought she must be drunk.

Anyhow, I got along pretty well. There really wasn't anything to it; my rule was to find everybody guilty. Sometimes, when the offender was a lady, and young and good-looking besides, I would be forgiving, and let her off with a dollar or two and a warning not to do it again. But I was hard as nails to everyone else—you bet the dignity of the law had to be upheld! God! how I enjoyed lecturing those poor fools, telling them a speeding driver was an enemy of the people, just the way old Judge Nichols used to pump it out to me. When anybody tried to talk back, I would double the fine—but I didn't have to do that more than twice. The fellow I had most fun with was a cabman named Mike Finney; I knew him from of old, and the way he used to gyp me out of my fares was a scandal. Well! here was my chance to get even. He wasn't up on much of a charge—only passing a red light. Still, I used my heaviest voice, and bawled him out as a menace to the community; and when he got fresh and said he was halfway across the street before the red light went on, I cut him short and told him he was a liar and in contempt of court. "That'll be a hundred dollars out of your pocket!" I

decided; and I felt as good as if I'd made a hundred myself when I saw how he went red in the face.

After about an hour, I thought it was time for the noon recess. As I stepped out of the court, I overheard someone saying, "Say, did you hear the Judge today? Whew! what a grizzly bear!"—which made me feel proud, knowing I had made a success. However, I had quite a comedown a little later, when I looked in the mirror in the washroom. Now I knew why people stared at me so oddly when I came into court, and why that girl tittered. There was a black oil-streak across the white of my collar! Worse still, a black patch, nearly an inch square, monopolized the knobular end of my nose!

Oh, why hadn't I thought of consulting a mirror before?

But no use worrying now! Let bygones be bygones, I thought. After a hearty lunch, which I paid for out of the contents of the Judge's wallet, I returned to court, feeling a great deal better. I got along beautifully for an hour or two, and helped the city treasury considerably . . . when, just as I was about ready to call it a day, I received the shock of my life.

A new offender came in—and I'm afraid I went pale as I stared at him. As a matter of fact, he also went pale—I saw what a gasp he gave, and how he glared back at me. That tall, slim form—that sharp-cut, angular, gray-eyed face—that old striped blue suit and battered old cap—it was all very familiar, and yet very strange. Surely, I was the firs man in all history able to look at himself! Or was it myself? Without doubt, this was the body of Ben Cummings! But this body was inhabited by another mind! And whose mind could it be? Whose, indeed, but Judge Nichols'? For the first time, sharply, gratingly, the realization came over me that, since I had stepped into his shoes, he must have stepped into mine!

THE charge against him was one of obstructing traffic. According to Officer Hendricks, who had made the arrest, his taxicab had stalled on the car-tracks at First Avenue and Madison, the busiest intersection in the city; and trolleys coming from four directions, not to speak of busses, trucks and private cars, had all been held up in one of the worst traffic jams in years.

"When I ordered him to pull to one side," testified Hendricks, "the idiot swore he couldn't make the car obey—said he was new to it, not on to its wrinkles! Just imagine! Why, ain't I seen this bird driving that same old tin can for three or four years! Finally, I had to hop into it myself, and pull him to the curb. It's deliberate interference with traffic, Your Honor—just cussed meanness, there ain't no other word for it!"

The accused man sputtered, and tried to protest. "But, Your—Your Honor, I swear, I couldn't get the car to respond. Why, it's the flimsiest, most worthless piece of junk I ever—"

It was at this point that I cut him short. It made me angry to hear him call my car a piece of junk. Besides, I was indignant at him—a little unreasonably, I must admit—for wearing my clothes and having possession of my body. Also, there was a sudden gloating inside me now that at last my old enemy, Judge Nichols, was in my power. And I resolved to make the best of my opportunity.

"Unless I'm mistaken," I said, trying to look severe, "you were here five times before on charges."

There was a pained expression on the culprit's face as he replied, "I—I'm afraid I don't remember, Your Honor."

"No—and for a good reason!" I drawled, ironically. Then, while the audience tittered, I bellowed,

"And what about yesterday, young man? Have you forgotten that you were here then, too? I let you off with a fine of one

hundred, didn't I? But don't you remember my words, 'The next offense, young man, and it'll be jail for you!' "

I paused for effect, knowing I had him just where I wanted him. The yellow cur had threatened me with jail, had he? Well, then, let him taste his own medicine!

"This court always keeps its promises," I went on, taking pleasure from the way he writhed at every word. "However, I'll be mild this time—which is more than you deserve. Ninety days for you, young man, in the county jail!"

It was pure delight to see how his face, pale before, went utterly white; then how he shot forward, sputtering out a protest, "But you can't—can't do that to me! You don't know who I am!"

"Oh, yes I do!" I answered, glibly. "Most likely you're Julius Caesar! Or maybe Adolph Hitler!"

A roar went up from the court as Officer Hendricks seized the offender, and applied a club to his resisting shoulders.

AFTER my victim had been dragged and pounded out of sight, I began to wonder whether I had done a wise thing after all. Mona would learn what had happened—and how would I let her know it wasn't really I that went to jail, but Judge Nichols? However, all was over between Mona and me, now that I was in the Judge's shoes! At least, I had done a good thing in keeping my enemy from her for three months. Thinking the matter over, I was sorry I hadn't made it six.

Before the afternoon was half gone, I began to get tired of hearing cases, and called it a day. I was just about to leave the building when the telephone rang; and, somehow, I had a sickly sinking sensation that it was nothing good. A woman's voice came to me from the other end of the line —a voice about as soft as a razor-edge, and as sympathetic as an ice-cube.

"Hello!"

"Hello! Who is it?"

"Who do you think it is? It's *me!*"

"Sorry. Can't hear. Afraid the connection isn't very good," I returned, wondering if this were some old flame of the Judge.

"It's me! *Me!* Julienne!"

This left me as deeply in the dark as ever. But, trying to make the best of a bad situation, I answered. "Well, well, and how are you, Julienne? Mighty nice of you to call me! How's the world treating you these days?"

Her reply hit me like a blow between the eyes. "My God, man! Don't you get fresh! Been drinking again? Or maybe you consider it a joke, pretending not to recognize your own wife's name! Well, you'll soon find I didn't call you on any joking matter!"

I staggered, and felt ready to collapse. So the phone call was from Hawk-Nose! But how could I have known that her name was Julienne?

"Don't think I haven't heard all about your disgraceful conduct!" she screeched at me. "The scandal's all over town! How you got down under the car, like any common workman! And how you came to court smeared up like a blackface vaudeville comedian! I tell you, I've stood all the humiliation I can! Unless you have some mighty good explanation, I'll see Forester, Bycott and Merwyn!"

Forester, Bycott and Merwyn, I knew, was a firm of divorce lawyers. I felt that I wouldn't mind dropping Hawk-Nose into the deep sea; but a divorce scandal, to a man in my position, would be hard to bear. Besides, how would I pay the alimony? Surely, mine was a hard lot! Although I had never been married, really, now I would be divorced, and have to pay alimony!

But it was useless to argue. When I told Hawk-Nose that I had never, so far as I knew, been a bad husband, she got

red-hot, and fired the names of about six hussies at me. "Better go to them for sympathy!" she cried, and rang off.

I was feeling pretty bad as I left the courthouse. I could see that already, in less than a day, I had made quite a hash of the Judge's life. But I got into the car, and drove away down Lofton Avenue; and pretty soon I came to a tavern I knew, and got out, and went in for consolation. Now I had always, when I was in my own shoes, been able to carry my liquor, and never really got drunk. However, it was different in Judge Nichols' shoes. After the first glass or two, I began to feel funny in the head; and after a few more glasses, I believe I began to sing and dance, although I haven't much recollection of that. I know that everything was whirling around me; and after a while it all went blank, and I slipped down, and fell off into a deep, leaden sleep. It seems to me I heard a voice—or maybe it was only a dream I had—"Ye gods, look at the Judge! Soused worse'n a sailor on shore leave!"

IT MUST have been hours later when I awoke. There was a pain in my head; my arms and shoulders were so bruised it hurt me to move. The air seemed heavy and foul, and there was an oppression in my limbs; and everything about me was dark, except for a dim light shining a little ways off. "Where in hell am I?" I cried out, more than a little frightened, for I thought I was the victim of foul play.

Then a shadowy figure loomed up, and I saw heavy dark bars running between him and me. "Where in hell you think you are?" he growled. "In a circus?"

I staggered to my feet, and, with trembling fingers, grasped at the bars. "What am I doing here? How—how can it be? What have I done? I—I—by God, it's impossible!"

"Now listen here," said the man, a little less roughly than before, "you're not quite yourself. Been having a nightmare, most likely. Guess you're not the first man, Ben Cummings, what ever got put in the cooler!"

These words told me all that I wanted to know—more than I wanted to know! Somehow I had realized it the minute I had awakened—realized it from the very feel of my body! I was no longer in Judge Nichols' shoes! The spell had worn itself out; the psychic conversion, the desire force, had been reversed; my intense wish to be rid of the Judge's burdens had upset the unstable equilibrium, and I was once more my old self! But at what a cost! I was in jail, serving a ninety-day term! And I was the one who had sentenced myself!

You may imagine that I cursed my idiocy. I have been cursing it all through these weeks, when I have been writing up the story in jail. But, at least, I have been able to make things up with Mona; she has visited me several times, and has cheered me with some delicious bits of gossip. Judge Nichols, she says, is the laughing-stock of the town. He behaved very oddly one day at court, and came in with a face blackened like a clown's. That same evening he was found in a tavern, so drunk you could have rolled him off the pavement. His wife afterwards filed suit for divorce. "Don't blame her, neither!" Mona added, hotly. "Serves him just right, darling, for the cruel, mean way he had you locked up!"

From the House of the Rat Catcher

THE barrel-like interior of the plane was gloomy. Joe Grimes twisted in his bucket-seat to ease the weight of the hundred-pound load—weapons and gear—that bulked him so hugely out of shape. The other paratroopers, Army men, not Marines, bulked equally ghostlike in the obscurity.

They talked around him, joked uneasily, smoked, vomited; the ship dropped, pulled up jerkily and rolled, for the moonlight air was bumpy and a high wind was blowing.

It was July 9th, 1943. Under that moon, somewhere ahead, lay Sicily, waiting.

"Hey, Joe!" said a voice in good-natured joshing. "How you making it?"

"Okay," replied Grimes.

"Well, no goofy business this trip, bud! This is one place you ain't been in before now."

There was a laugh; it relieved the tension.

"Maybe not," rejoined Grimes, with his rumbling, hearty laugh. "Wait till I get there and see. Ain't airsick anyhow, and I sure been *that* before!"

A little kidding had a wonderful effect on taut nerves. Everybody relaxed and took it more easily. Grimes was burly, tough, hard as iron. Everybody in the outfit liked him and he liked everybody. Little he cared if they called him Goofy Joe! Any nickname was an honor in this gang. Finest of the fine—you had to be a superman first, then a paratrooper. That was top-hole in the Service.

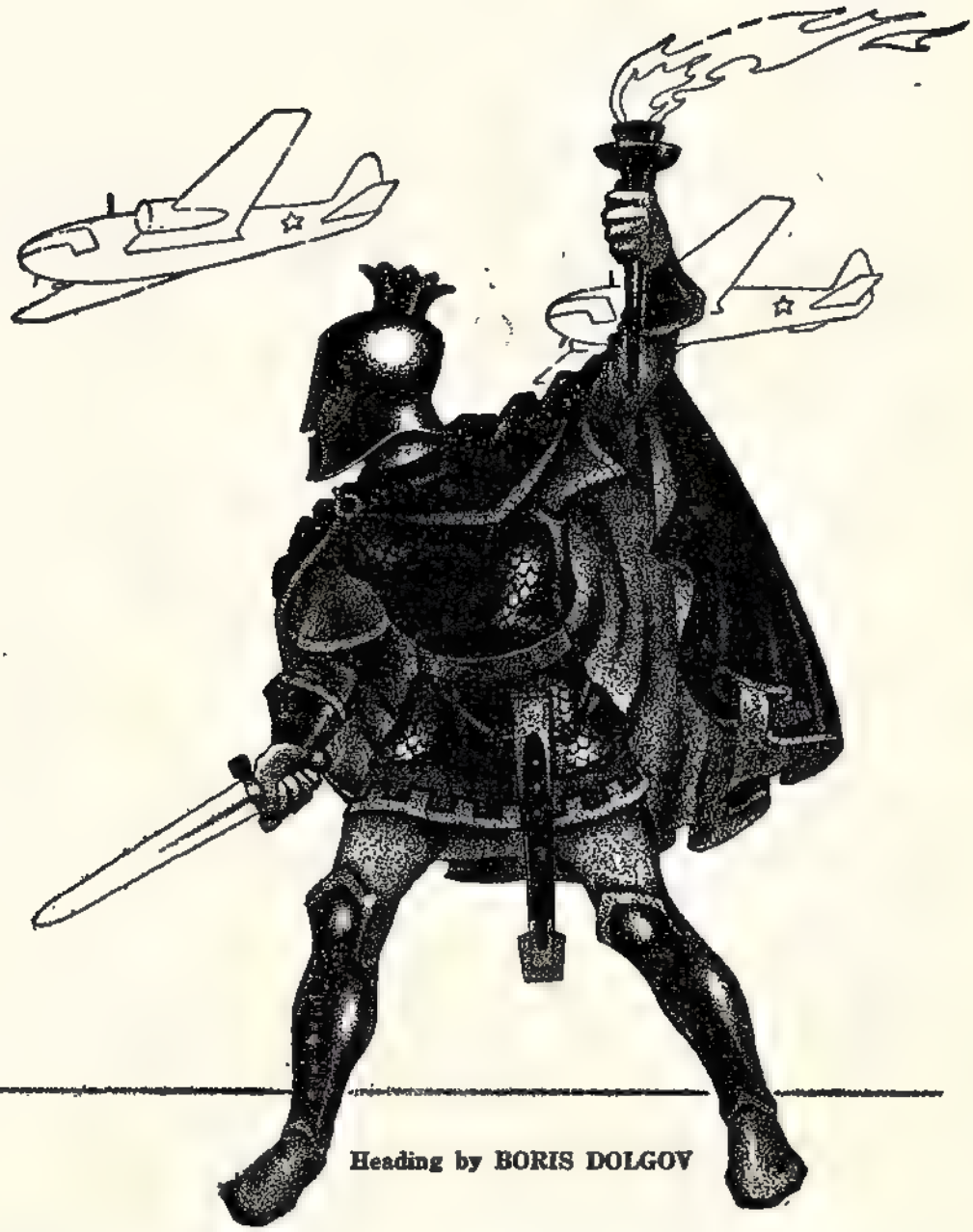
It was odd, though, how his nickname had risen. Back home in training days, even back on the transport coming over, it was the same thing. Over and over the feeling had come to Grimes, sometimes vaguely, sometimes clearcut—he had done this before, he had been here before, he had seen such-and-such a thing before. Because he talked too openly about it at first, the nickname had come.

It was good-natured, it meant nothing much. Mentally he was tops and they all knew it. Like most nicknames in the corps, it went by contrasts. To call him Goofy Joe was a good joke, because he most emphatically was not in the least goofy. So he liked it.

One of the officers who probed into his half-fancies had claimed they were actual memories, or remains of memories, from other lives. To Grimes, that was a lot of baloney. These days, when the feeling came, he said nothing about it; he had learned his lesson. What started him off on one of these spells was hard to say. Anything might do it—a bump when land-

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Beneath the paratrooper lay Sicily, but a Sicily of centuries ago, of historic cities and temples, of ageless intrigue!



Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

ing, a dazzling light, anything at all. If he tried, he could not bring it on.

All this slid out of his mind as a word was passed along, and men tensed. That wide blotch ahead in the moonlight was dark Sicily. They were almost there! Ruddy tongues of fire jumped across the horizon, relics of the tons of bombs dropped by the day's air raids. The plane droned on monotonously. An officer was talking, giving a refresher speech on details everybody knew; Grimes scarcely heard it. Flak was bursting and he wondered if any of the planes would be hit; good thing the bucket seats were bullet-proof!

His nerves jumped suddenly; everyone came taut, as the red warning light flashed on. He rose. The grotesque, shapeless figures around came erect and began to hook up the release lines. Flares had been re-

leased and were floating over shores and rocky shelving hills. He was waiting, they were all waiting, for the red light to become green.

In this moment, this fraction of a moment, of waiting, time suddenly stopped for Joe Grimes. (You know yourself how the last ten minutes of your homeward ride may be either a cold, hungry, nerve-tortured eternity or a laughing conversational orgy that is gone in a flash.) For him, it stopped.

He was conscious of the orders. The plane was circling somewhere back of the town of Gela; this group was hours ahead of the fleet and landing. It had special work, before the Rangers came ashore there and took the town. It had to work on that long hill back of the town and locate the hidden battery commanding the sweep of shore. Intelligence had sure word of those hidden guns; they must be found at all costs. His own tactical group had to locate that battery and knock hell out of it. Otherwise the shore landing would be a welter of blood and death.

This was a long process in his mind, this reflection and remembrance. Then time clicked again for him, with a roar of sound. The red light had gone. The green light was on—his mind had been working in that little instant of change. The others were rushing and pushing to get out. Five hundred feet, speed one hundred and ten—they were going out, he was going out—he was out. The first Americans into Axis Europe!

"Geronimo!" He was yelling the word with the others, the jumping word that expanded throat and muscles and met the drop and atmospheric pressure. Not the cuss-words used by the Marines—"Geronimo! Geronimo!"

Then he was floating, keeping his legs together, readying them for the landing, hauling them up. The earth was close now. Chutes were all around him. He had a glimpse of his wrist-watch dial, as his hands gripped the cords; the exact moment registered. 12:40. He knew this, he was certain of it. 12:40.

Here was the ground. He was dropping into blackness out of moonlight. He touched, and rolled over and over, gloved hands gripping at the cords, fumbling for the chute release. Another man barged into him. They yelled at each other and yelling, struck head on. The helmets clashed. That was Clancy, dammit . . .

For Joe Grimes, everything went out in a shower of sparks and tumbling stars.

HOW long it lasted, he could not tell. He was slow in coming around and felt stiff with cold. He was vaguely conscious of the moonlit night, then heard a voice beside him. He recognized by its authority and decision that it was an officer's voice, though it was none he knew or remembered.

"He's had a bad crack but he's all right. I'll stay with him and bring him in. Get on with you, everybody! You know the orders. Clear out. Leave us alone. I'll say a prayer."

A chaplain, of course. Grimes tried to lift his head, but grunted and relaxed as a wave of pain dizzied him. He was blissfully free of his crushing load; guns and gear were gone, thank heaven!

Almost at once, however, came new crisis. The man beside him leaned close and spoke guardedly at his ear.

"You've come around; all right, use your head! We're in a tight pinch. They'll be back in a minute to kill us both. Roll over. Crawl. Don't make a sound. Follow me."

The urgency in that voice roused Grimes to action. Groggy as he was, he managed to obey the orders, inching himself along the ground after the other man. The shadows were black and fathomless, but ahead the moonglow and starlight

dimly revealed enormously wide stone stairs. The voice drifted back to him.

"Well done! Now for the stairs; once up, we're safe for the moment. I'll tackle 'em first. Keep to the right, where the shadow falls."

Grimes grunted assent. He must have been out quite a while, he reflected, for he had been stripped of baggy suit and high boots; not so much as a knife remained. A faint scramble and the other man was bounding up the stairs, keeping to the shadows. He picked himself up and followed, dizzily. He stubbed his toe and swore with hearty emphasis.

A laugh sounded. There was the other man, holding a hand to him, hauling him up to a platform between two uprights. These uprights were legs. Above them, towering in the moonbeams, was a colossal statue whose bulk shadowed them.

"Good work. Take it easy, now," said the unknown. "If we get out of this, we'll be damned good; it's going to take some figuring. They've got us blocked on all sides. I'd be dead now if you hadn't come along just when you did. Those blasted guards of mine are in the plot; luckily, they didn't know I was on to 'em."

Grimes could see the speaker now. He was a big fellow, bareheaded, handsome, with a powerful head and shoulders; he wore what looked like a loose flowing nightgown of rich scarlet trimmed with gold. Then, turning his gaze, Grimes saw something else—and the sight knocked him speechless.

There, curving far out in the moonlight, was the same sea-edged shore he had seen from the plane hatchway. The flares were gone now but the moonlight was stronger. The rocky ground and the little town of Gela were gone. In their place was a city, even whiter and larger than Tunis, that stretched clear from the shore up to this point, the long shoulder of hill behind and above the town.

Nor was this the bare rocky cactus-clad scarp pictured to him and the other men; all his memories of those instructions, of his comrades, of the invasion, were growing dim and fading out. Above rose the colossal figure, an image of a man holding a bow. Behind, occupying the crest, was a stone platform that ran back to the pillars of a temple. It, like the city below, was snowy white and shimmering in the moon light.

"It's a dream!" muttered Grimes. "I got knocked daffy and I'm still dreaming!"

Beside the great steps and running back along the side of the temple and beyond, were dark, tall trees. Grimes looked at the grove and heard them sighing and rustling in the sea-breeze. The other man laughed, and extended to him a small leathern bottle.

"Here, there's a drop of wine left; polish it off. Dreaming? Far from it."

"This isn't Gela," muttered Grimes.

"It certainly is. Gela, my city! I suppose you'll say next that I'm not Gelon, dictator of Gela and of Syracuse—*tyrannos* of all eastern Sicily! Or that you're not Eacarces, my bodyguard, the one faithful man, the only one I can trust in this emergency! Finish that wine; it'll clear your head. Apollo!" Gelon lifted an arm to the towering bronze statue above them. "Apollo Loxias! Apollo the Inspirer! Your friend Gelon is in a pinch and needs help. Produce it! These rascally Carthaginians from Africa and some of his own people have caught him off guard. . . ."

"Caught off second, by gosh!" muttered Grimes. "Eacarces, huh? That's a hell of a name."

This was almost his last coherent thought as Joe Grimes. He gulped the wine, and it cleared his head. The situation came into focus. He was indeed Eacarces, this was indeed Gela. There was a girl, Chryseis, who lived in the lower part of the town; her old man had a whole fleet of

tunny-boats and was well off . . . yes, things were coming back to him.

His skull was ringing a bit; he had received a nasty crack when he fell, in getting back to Gelon with the warning. And Gelon had bluffed the handful of guards, sending them on so casually . . . there was a man for you, by heaven! Perhaps more than man; there was something godlike about him.

Eacarces looked at the dim figure with heartfelt admiration. He had been a professional runner and boxer, a wandering athlete along the Italian coasts. Gelon had picked him as bodyguard. The two men clicked from the start. Each possessed the same quality of arms, brave faith. Each man rang true.

Gelon, of course, was an aristocrat. He was master of Syracuse as well as of Gela and Agrigentum; he had fleets, armies, enemies—and friends. This time, his friends had gone back on him and he had been trapped, here in his own city. Carthaginian agents, envious nobles, traitor guards, had combined to trap him. Now, stripped for the moment of all power and wealth, a hunted fugitive, Gelon perched under the colossal statue of Apollo—and his strong, manly laugh rang out as heartily as ever, even with death close upon him. He had no fear of anything or anyone. A man's man, Gelon!

THE magic of the moonlit night, the star-struck carpet of the sky, the shimmering sea and the white outspread city, was potent even in this desperate moment. Beginning on the far side of this very ridge were the vast grain-fields, sweeping on across the uplands to the hills. This long-bearded wheat was the wealth of Sicily; it grew in quantities incredible and was exported to the whole world. The granaries of Gela, stretching along the shore by the river-mouth below, were bursting store-houses of wealth. . . .

"To work, Eacarces!" The vibrant, energetic voice broke him abruptly from his reflections. "Those rascally guards of mine lost their chance to kill me, thanks to you; but we're in a tight spot. Every egress from the city's under guard. The barracks, the waterfront, the arsenal, the walls and gates, are patroled. If we don't get away to safety before daylight, we're lost."

"Right," assented Eacarces. "That big cavalry base of yours at Pantelica is only twenty miles away. No traitors there!"

"Sure. How'll we get there? Fly over the walls?"

"Oh! We'll have to get out of here first."

"Precisely."

"Well, there's the answer." Eacarces jerked his thumb toward the temple. "The priests of Apollo—"

Gelon laughed harshly, scornfully.

"They're in the plot, too. I heard today that the oracle had given out word that Gelon would find life or death at Gela. The usual double meaning, of course; but that shows the priests are lined up against me."

"Well, make the oracle fall your way! Get out of here and you'll find life!"

Gelon grunted and made a gesture.

A torch was flaring at the temple entrance. The usual midnight ceremony of a visit to the oracle was going on, but the torchlight showed something else. A faint glitter shone out to right and left of it; armed men, soldiers, were patrolling the temple walls and grounds.

Down below, where the great stone stairs began, showed other torches, and still others flitted here and there through the streets. The hunt was on.

"Caught like rats! Without so much as a weapon!" growled Gelon angrily.

Eacarces started slightly; rats! That reminded him.

"Is it midnight yet?" he demanded.

"A little past." Gelon pointed to the temple, from which were coming a dozen or two men across the platform, heading for the stairs and the streets below. "The midnight visit to the oracle is just over. Why?"

Eacarces stood up, swept up dust from the stones, and smeared his face.

"I've thought of something. You can stick it out here for an hour. If I'm not recognized as your bodyguard, I'll be back then."

"If recognized, you'll be killed."

"Quite so; but I'll pass for a slave, and remain alive."

"You can get a fistful of gold pieces by betraying me."

Eacarces chuckled. "I can get a basketful by saving you! I'm a practical man."

Gelon uttered a laugh. "You're a fool! Where are you going?"

"If I told you, then you'd say to stay here. Instead, trust me." He held out his hand to the other man, who gripped it hard. "You talk to Apollo, I'll talk to someone else of less authority—wait! Give me that gold pin from your peplon."

The dictator asked no question, but removed a handsome gold brooch from the neck of his royal scarlet tunic. Eacarces took it; and naked to the waist like any slave, darted away. The file of worshipers were on the stairs. He slipped in among them. No one paid any attention.

Below were soldiers and torches. The group was halted, then passed, and scurried off. All were in haste to reach their homes safely. When they broke up, Eacarces darted away, chuckling.

The House of the Rat Catcher, in the lower street opposite the Syracusan winesop; this was his goal. He had a date there with Chryseis, and had all but forgotten it until that curious train of thought sparked his brain; then he had remembered something else. Goats! Rats led to goats, by way of a sulky-eyed girl. And goats might—by the barest possibility—be the answer to his desperate problem.

"She'll be in a stew over being kept waiting," he reflected as he hurried along. "Fact is, I promised to take her to watch the dancing at the Sunken Gardens—that's out now. This brooch may save the day. She's a regular little gold-digger, that gal!"

He collected more dirt en route and smeared his face anew. If recognized, he was done for; the bodyguard of the dictator was far too well known. True, Gelon was dictator here; he had inherited the rule of Gela, but after mastering her rival Syracuse had made that city his home. This provoked jealousy and hatred in Gela, and Carthaginian agents scattering gold had done the rest. Those African bandits would step in and loot all Sicily once they had the single strong ruler out of the way, and could destroy the cities piecemeal. Gelon had built up a united rule from Syracuse to Gela and beyond to Agrigentum—

THERE was the House of the Rat Catcher ahead, surrounded by trees; a public gift to a man from Rhegium who kept the granaries clear of rats. Its gardens ran clear down to the Gela river. And there, under the trees, was a cloaked shadow. Eacarces hurried up.

"Well, you certainly took your time!" broke out Chryseis. "Do you know how long you've kept we waiting here, with the city full of rioting soldiers and the gods only know what's going on? And—"

"Listen, my dear, I can explain everything," began Eacarces. She halted him in new anger.

"Explain! You dare to keep a date with me in that costume—oh!" She gasped at closer sight of him. "Do you think I'm going to the Sunken Gardens with anyone who looks like a slave? Keep away from me! You're filthy, dirty, you beast!"

"Well, I saved this, anyhow." Eacar-

ces held up the brooch in the moonlight. It was a truly regal gaud, hand-chiseled out of massy Egyptian gold, and a different sort of gasp came from her at sight of it. "I had this and a necklace to go with it. I got into that riot of drunken soldiers and was lucky to save my life. They tore off most of my clothes and rolled me in the mud, but I hung on to this. It's a beauty, eh? Gelon gave it to me."

"Is it real?" she exclaimed, awed by the touch of it.

"Of course. Well, that's why I'm late. And we can't go to the Gardens tonight. The boss is leaving for Syracuse in an hour and of course I must go along. We'll have to put off that date till next time I'm around this way."

Chryseis murmured something, anything. She was fondling the brooch and lost in admiration of it. Why, it was heavy enough to buy a couple of slaves!

"A dozen, if you pick one of those Tyrian dealers; they're nuts about gold," Eacarces said carelessly. "Look, honey; I've only got a minute or two. Must get back. Do you remember telling me once about following a goat, when you were a kid, and getting smack into the oracle of Apollo, up back of the temple?"

With an effort, she brought her mind back to him. She pinned the brooch into her tunic and reached forward and gave him a hearty smack.

"There, sweet man, that's for thanks! Dirty or not—why, of course I remember! I'd probably have been whipped to death if the priests had ever found out about it."

"Tell me again. I've got a bet with a guard captain that I can reach the oracle without going through the temple. I'll work him up well and make the bet a really fat one, and split with you when I win it, next trip."

"You'll win something you don't bargain on, if those priests catch you!" she said.

"Me? The dictator's bodyguard? Not much. Whisper it, honey!" He slipped an arm about her, wiped his face with a corner of her robe, and found her lips. She laughed.

"Well, you know the big statue, and the wall around the grove to the right of it. It begins at the steps. You follow that wall. It's all grown up with trees and brush. You come to two cypresses together, very tall, taller than the other trees, afer you've gone a long way."

"On the hillside above town, yes," he said. "But that's where the solid rock begins."

"Oh, no! I thought so too, till I saw the goats coming in and out. The wall's broken down there, by some old trees. It was a terrible climb, I remember, but it takes you into a cleft in the rock, exactly like some god had carved it along the hillside. You can't see it from anywhere. Well, you get to the top and turn left. That's the end of the cut, and comes into a grotto. The oracle is there."

"So. And the other end of the cut? Where does that go?"

"Oh, I don't know. Somewhere out around the hill—clear past the city walls anyhow."

He kissed her again, swiftly, passionately. What an ideal bargain all around —from her standpoint, from his own, from that of Gelon! Never had a gold pin served variant purposes so well. She had no objections to going home alone; indeed, he rather suspected that she would head for the Summer Gardens without him to show off her splendor.

So he got clear of her and made for the hillside and the temple once more.

He kept a bright lookout, passing from shadow to shadow, threading his way along the narrow streets that climbed the height. A furious exultation seized him and bore him onward. That glorious temple stood just at the edge of the city walls, and at

this one point, outside them. There was no doubt whatever that he had learned something of the utmost value, not only for the moment, but also for the future if Gelon wanted to punish his angry city! That is, if it were true.

She might have lied. She might have made the whole thing up. Even were it true, long years had passed. Perhaps that broken wall had been brought to light, that cleft in the rock discovered and walled up! Goats that pointed the way to one, might have pointed it to others since then. At this thought, chilled as he was, he broke into an anxious sweat. That cleft in the rock, unseen and unknown, suddenly became the biggest thing in the world to him.

It loomed so large in his mind that he even forgot his face, wiped clean on the robe of Chryseis. But he thought of it suddenly, when he panted around a corner and broke into a glare of light from torches, and hands grabbed at him. Here were half a dozen armored men, men of the guards, men who knew him!

"Eacarces!" shrilled up the yell of recognition, as they gripped him. "Where is he? Where's the tyrant? Speak, you damned dog—"

"In the temple!" blurted out Eacarces. "Gone to the temple—sanctuary—the altar of the god—"

Hot voices yelped. A spear-point drove at him, a sword slashed at him. Both reached him; he slumped and sprawled on the stones with blood spurting. They were off with an excited blether of voices, in a mad rush of frenzied haste.

Staggering, he came to his feet. They were just under the stairs. He looked up and saw the torches flaring along past the pediment of that colossal statue of Apollo; torches and guards together swept up past the statue and on toward the temple beyond.

Eacarces stumbled forward, hand pressed hard against his side. The spear had done small damage, but the sword-cut was a bad one, under the ribs and deep. He came to the great stairs and paused there. His voice lifted bravely.

"Gelon! Come down, come down quickly! Quickly!"

A timid soul would have feared a trap, would have hesitated and hung fire. Not Gelon! He knew the voice, he knew the heart. From between the legs of the giant statue his figure slipped out and came running down the limestone stairs.

"This way! No time to waste!" said Eacarces, turning aside to the dark thicket along the retaining wall.

They reached it together, pressing on among the trees and brush that clad the steep slope. A faint tumult reached them from the temple; it was being searched. Gelon laughed at the sounds. On and on they fought their way, whipped by branches, seeking ever the two high cypress trees reaching into moonlit air. Eacarces babbled out what he had learned, as they went along. Blood was running down his leg, his energy was failing.

"There they are!" exclaimed Gelon. "A cleft in the rock behind, you say? I never heard of it. No matter! If it's there, we've won!"

They came to the cypress trees and shoved in for the wall behind. Matted undergrowth checked them, but they got through.

"By the gods, you're right!" cried Gelon. "The wall's crumbled—climb for it!"

That was a climb indeed for the sound man, a horror for the hurt man. Gelon dragged Eacarces up the last length of it and stood up.

"It's there—look!" Awe was in his voice, as he viewed the unsuspected cleft that followed the line of the ridge. But Eacarces, clinging to a tree, sobbed for breath and could see nothing.

"Go on," he said. "Go on, I'll follow. Let me wait—get my breath—make sure no one is after us. Turn right, be sure and turn right—"

Gelon, fiercely exultant, plunged away as bidden, and was gone to safety.

EACARCES lifted his head. Everything was silent here, though it semed that a breath of faint voices stirred in the high cypress branches. His eyes cleared. Far below lay stretched the city, white and shimmering in the moonlight. Northward were the wide plains of golden grain, stretching afar to the dark line of the hills and broken by the little river, which lifted the eye to the snowy crest of Etna in the distance. His gaze followed the line of hills as they dropped and lowered to the eastern shore by the Scalambrian cape—then everything blurred.

He caught at the tree. He could feel the strength, the very life, pouring out of him. Everything went black. Only that awful feeling of his life-stream gushing forth, and voices in the trees, voices that increased with strength, speaking his name:

"Eacarces! Eacarces!"

A hand was shaking him, a voice was at his very ear. He looked up. The moonlight was there, but everything else was gone—trees and temple alike. Nothing here except bare naked shelving rock, and the dark, baggy figure above him.

Joe! For Gawdsake wake up, Joe! You ain't hurt!"

That was Clancy's voice—good old Clancy! With an effort, Joe Grimes sat up; all the weight of his equipment was upon him again. He found voice.

"Did he get away? Did he get away?"

Clancy shook him savagely. "Come on! The colonel's here and there's hell to pay —we can't find that damned battery. The directions are all twisted."

Dazed, struggling to comprehend, Grimes looked at his wrist, pulled back his glove, and saw the luminous dial there: 12:42. His jaw dropped, his eyes bugged out. Why, it had been 12:40 just before he hit the ground—the damned watch had stopped! But it had not stopped. He saw the sweep-second hand clicking around.

From somewhere came a growl of voices. He caught his name. Clancy shook him again.

"Come on, ya big mutt! Quit dreaming! Come on!"

He heaved himself upright, Clancy lending a hand. He looked around—what the devil! There was the same sickle-sweep of curving shoreline, the distant hills, the cape dark in the moonlight. . . .

Something came to put life in him. He lumbered forward at the dark cluster of figures and broke in upon them without ceremony or formality.

"Hey! I think I can find that place! It runs parallel with the ridge. It lays over here to the right, just along past where the temple used to be—"

"Migawd, he's off again!" groaned somebody. "Goofy Joe! Been here before, have you?"

He swung on them fiercely. "Never mind! I know damn well what I'm doing! That place lays off to the right, and you can't see it till you climb slap into it—"

The voice of the colonel cut in with quiet decision.

"Lead the way, Grimes. And if you lead us wrong, by God I'll take you apart!"

He turned and lumbered away, and broke into speed. He could remember fighting along through that thicket of trees, right along this same slope. No cypresses up above now; no wall, but just the same he had the feel of the place. He pushed ahead confidently, surely. Off to the left the moonlight disclosed a little steep scarp of rock, in no way different from the rock

around, but he pointed at it with his tommy-gun.

"There y'are! I told you! Up and over that—"

They went at it. A startled Italian yell quavered up from nowhere. Then they were into it before they knew it—into the long concealed battery there, guns emplaced out of sight—Eyeties running and yelling, guns stuttering away in red smashes. Then, when things had scarcely started, the show was all over, with masses of men holding up hands and waving white cloths in surrender.

A little later, the colonel strode up to Grimes and Clancy.

"That was damned good work, Grimes," said he heartily. "You were the only one of us all who kept his bearings. Boy, it was perfect! Spread farther along that ridge yonder; they say Nazi tanks are coming up."

When they were alone, Clancy put his head close in the moonlight.

"Good work, my eye!" he said softly. "Joe, you were havin' one of your fits again. I know durned well you were dreaming, after we hit! I had a hell of a job fetching you out of it."

"You're a damned liar. I was just—just getting my bearings," said Joe Grimes. Clancy's big hand slammed him on the shoulder.

"Okay, feller! Keep it up, anyhow! You'll get your chevrons out of this job, so keep it up!"

"Aw, nuts," said Goofy Joe, and grinned happily.

Why Man's Prayers Did Not Stop Hitler

Millions of people daily practice meditation, prayer, new thought and other spiritual exercises. For many years people of good will have been praying for the overthrow of Hitler, Hirohito and what they stand for. Why has the answer been so long delayed? Why do so many other prayers remain unanswered? Why does calamity often befall us in spite of our prayers?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answers to these questions. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong can be solved.

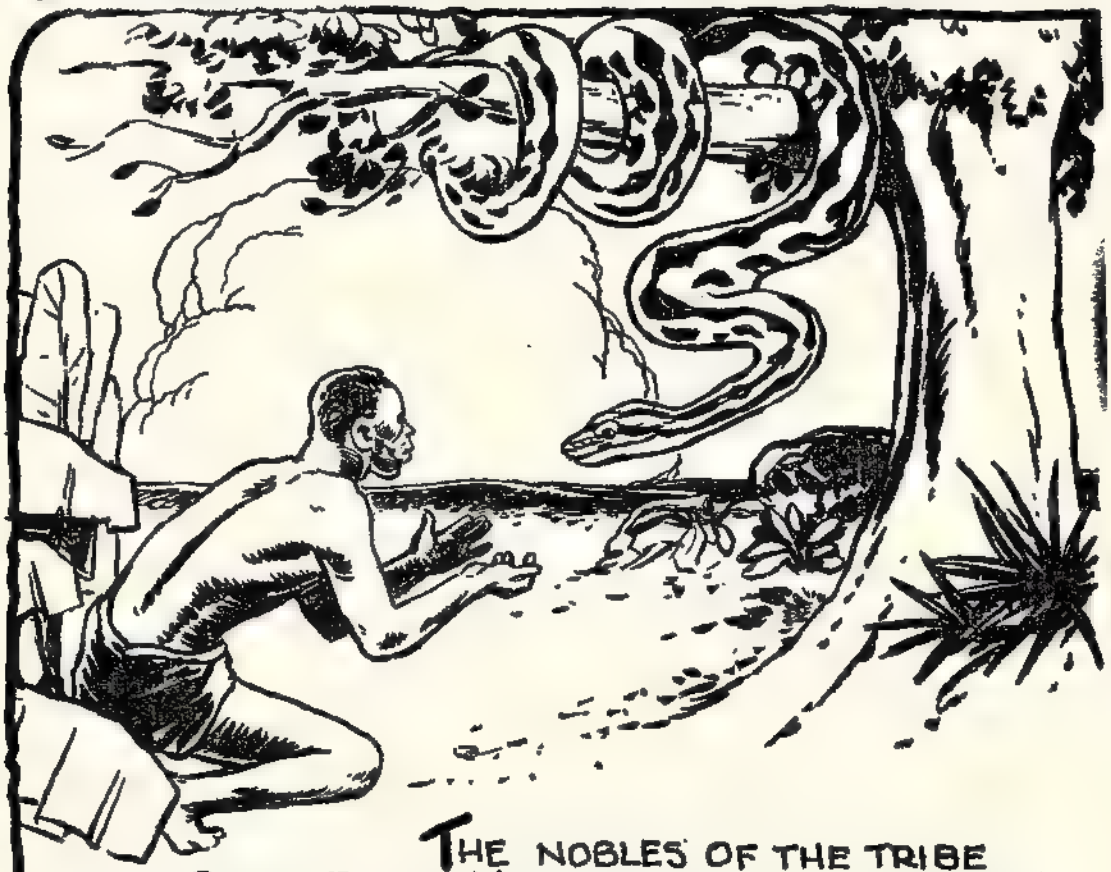
In his own case he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his 21 years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power which there came to him.

Within 10 years he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading geographical societies for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this notice a 9,000-word treatise. It is free. For your free copy, send your name and address to the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. H-196, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Write promptly.

SUPERSTITIONS

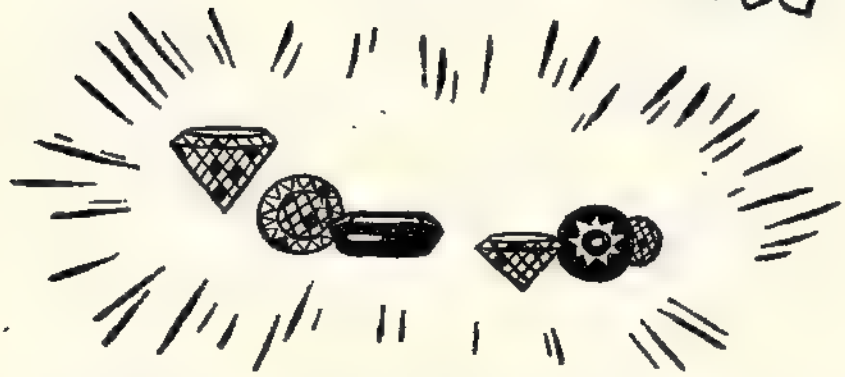


THE NOBLES OF THE TRIBE OF BETSILEO IN MADAGASCAR ARE THOUGHT TO HAVE THE POWER OF TURNING INTO **BOA CONSTRICTORS** AT DEATH! ACCORDINGLY, THESE HUGE SERPENTS ARE REGARDED AS SACRED AND NOBODY WOULD DARE TO KILL ONE OF THEM. THE PEOPLE GO DOWN ON THEIR KNEES TO THEM AND SALUTE THEM, JUST AS THEY WOULD TO A REAL LIVE NOBLEMAN. WHEN A BOA CONSTRICTOR VISITS A VILLAGE WHICH IT IS BELIEVED HE FORMERLY INHABITED IN HUMAN FORM, THERE IS GREAT REJOICING, AND HE IS CARRIED OFF TO THE PUBLIC SQUARE *WHERE HE IS ALLOWED TO* ***GORGE HIMSELF*** *WITH THE BLOOD OF A SACRIFICED OX!*

AND TABOOS

by Bill

IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES THE WATER LILY IS REGARDED AS AN **ANTIDOTE** FOR A PERSON WHO HAS TAKEN *A* **LOVE POTION!**



IT WAS ONCE BELIEVED THAT A DIAMOND WOULD BREAK THE TEETH IF IT WERE PUT INTO THE MOUTH OR RUPTURE THE INTESTINE IF SWALLOWED! THE WINE COLORED AMETHYST RECEIVED ITS NAME WHICH MEANS "NOT DRUNKEN," BECAUSE *IT WAS SUPPOSED TO KEEP THE WEARER OF IT* **SOBER!**

The Peeper

By ***FRANK BELKNAP LONG***

MIKE O'HARA approached his lodgings obliquely, his big shoulders hunched and his footsteps echoing hollowing along the narrow street. It was past midnight, but a few lights blinked cheerlessly here and there, and shadows scuttled out of doorways ahead of him to take refuge in alley-

Heading by JOHN GIUNTA

Strands of hair hung up to dry on his doorstep, a corpse in his bed . . .

ways which were faintly streaked with radiance from a dimmed-out bowling alley near the middle of the block.

Being in a pitiable state, O'Hara had to keep telling himself there was no danger he'd be set upon. The street was deserted, and he refused to believe that anything untoward would take advantage of his condition by leaping out of the shadows and fastening its teeth in his throat.

To be sure, *Michael* O'Hara lived in dread of returning late home on a dark night, and finding himself with no redress but to leap screaming back from something with glassy eyes and bared teeth. But *Michael* O'Hara was a poet who wrote ghostly stories for the magazines and believed in evil things which waited beyond the lamplight for unwary pedestrians on deserted streets.

Michael O'Hara did truly believe in such things, but tonight he wasn't Michael. He was Mike. Plain Mike O'Hara, and to hell with spirits when they didn't come out of bottles labeled eighty-five proof.

Tonight he wasn't spiritually on the spit. He was Mike O'Hara, hard-boiled, skeptical, and far from intoxicated, he told himself with fervor—even though his steps had carried him unevenly along the pavement, and he was now ascending the brownstone stoop of Mrs. Hammerslough's shabby-genteel, lavender-decade boarding house with a treacherous feeling in the pit of his stomach.

There wasn't a sound in the darkness beneath him, and not a light showed in the darkness above. He had been humming, "Oh, my darlin'," but suddenly his throat seemed to constrict and his voice faded out, leaving him at the mercy of a silence which closed in upon him with the smothering force of a coffin-lid being riveted to his face.

He climbed higher in the darkness, his shoulders jerking, his forehead studded with sweat. Up above the darkness was of a uniform quality except in one spot. At one side of the door and extending down over the stoop was an elongated patch of something which seemed to give off little weaving coruscations of light.

No, not light exactly. The something seemed enveloped in an odd, negative kind of brightness which kept moving about as he stared up at it. It was as though—as though a little to the left of the doorway the darkness had been ripped apart, and the emptiness beyond it was trying to shine through in fitful gleams.

Higher he climbed and higher. The stoop seemed to lengthen as he ascended, seemed to flow away beneath him, and he had all he could do to maintain his footing as he struggled to reach the top.

FINALLY, after ages so long his whole life seemed to pass in review before him, he found himself standing before the weaving something. It still looked a little like a rent in the darkness, a kind of ripped-out patch of negative radiance extending down over the stoop. But now he could make out another something hanging in the depths of the glow: a dank, heavily scented something which looked not unlike a pigtail.

It was fastened with a little peg to the upper part of the brightness, and as he stared at it a shudder took hold of his spine.

"Good God," he choked.

His vision had steadied a little and he could see now that the peg wasn't really attached to the brightness at all. It jutted from the weather-tarnished bronze bell-plate on the left side of the doorway and the glow was a thing separate and apart, a kind of luminous cocoon which cradled the pigtail without encroaching on its substance in the least.

The pigtail was attached by the peg to the house itself, a little to the left of the old-fashioned doorbell. For an instant he stood staring at it, pushing out his lips like

a schoolboy confronting an adult horror which he knew all about deep down inside, and wasn't one bit afraid of.

Not one bit afraid of, because he wasn't Michael O'Hara tonight. He was just plain Mike and he'd even touch it, by heaven, to show his contempt for it. A tremor went through him, a tremor of resentment and anger that such a thing could be, and quite suddenly he was tugging at it with both hands, and—

"Sure, and it was a nasty fall you had, Mr. O'Hara," a gruff voice said.

Groaning, Mike O'Hara picked himself up. He had no recollection of falling, only of a kind of explosion in his brain which had seemingly lifted himself up and hurled him with violence from the stoop.

"Kilgallen, my head," he groaned. "My head—"

The fact that he was picking himself up from the cold sidewalk with the help of a broad-shouldered police lieutenant had a sobering effect on him, for it was the first time he had ever needed to be assisted to his feet by the Law, and it made him feel that he had sunk very low.

"Sure, and it is a little tight you are," the officer chuckled. "You were no doubt celebrating your daughter's wedding, Mr. O Hara?"

"I have no daughter, Kilgallen," O'Hara groaned. "I'm only thirty-four."

"Ah, what a pity."

The officer put a steadying arm about O'Hara's shoulder and chuckled again. "A daughter steadies a man, Mr. O'Hara. Come now, up we go!"

"Hair, Kilgallen," O'Hara groaned. "Hung up to dry. Two long locks of hair, braided like a pigtail. They were wet, Kilgallen, and—"

"Come now, you can sleep it off. A pigtail, was it? Well, well, well—"

"*Nailed* to the door, Kilgallen. The Greeks—"

Lieutenant Kilgallen nodded sympathetically. "So you've been tanking up at Joe Sarripolos' place, eh? Well, I'll say this for Joe. He sure knows how to mix them."

"No, Kilgallen, no. Joe's a modern Greek and it's an ancient custom I'm talking about. It was an ancient Greek custom to cut a lock of hair from a dead man's head, and nail it outside the door, in token there was a corpse in the house. They used wooden nails, Kilgallen, and—"

O'HARA never knew how he arrived in his room. He was sure that Kilgallen hadn't assisted him all the way up, because he remembered parting from the police officer in the lower hallway with a muttered: "Thanks a lot, Kilgallen. I'll be okay now."

But he couldn't remember ascending the stairs, or locking himself in his room. Leaning against the door to make sure it *was* locked, and breathing heavily, he told himself there was only one sensible thing to do.

If he wanted to hold on to his sanity the only sensible thing was to dissolve three aspirins in a glass of water, kick off his shoes and assume a recumbent position. He was home now—and safe. If he slept it off there was a chance he wouldn't wake up screaming. Not an even chance, perhaps, but a chance, a chance—

He was crossing unsteadily to the bathroom when he saw the still, gray figure stretched out at full length on his bed.

The figure lay on the bed with something that looked like a half-consumed loaf of bread between its hands. Its arms were crossed at the wrists, and its legs were stretched out stiff and straight. There were sandals on its feet, and the flesh between the straps had a hideous, waxen look.

The face of the figure also had a waxen look, but there was about it something beautiful and strange which even the ghastly pallor could not efface. There was noth-

ing effeminate about the face, and yet more than the beauty of mortality seemed to rest upon it, so that a man looking upon it for the first time might think himself in the presence of a saint.

Later he might notice a Satanic aspect such as saints do not possess, and come to realize that the face was that of a great poet who could summon spirits from the vasty deep.

O'Hara knew of course that the still figure was not his *present* self. The still figure had graduated from Dublin University with great, eternal thoughts hovering at the back of his head. The still figure had worn his hair long, and had looked a little ridiculous walking down the street.

But he had written stories like dew-drenched spider webs, prismatic and strange and with a little gruesome wrench at the end which made people happy deep down inside. Very sensitive and imaginative people, of course, because only such people deserved to be made happy in precisely that way.

With black horror clutching at his throat, Mike O'Hara stared down at the still cold figure of his younger self.

"Mike O'Hara, your salary is forty thousand a year and you are the most brilliant keyhole columnist east of Chicago," said a terrible, accusing voice which seemed to come from deep inside O'Hara's own head.

"I—I—"

"Your column is well enough in its way, Mike O'Hara. But need you have killed *him* because you could no longer abide his dreams?"

"Oh, God, I—"

"You killed him, Mike O'Hara. As surely as though you had plunged a knife into his heart!"

Mike O'Hara suddenly felt his knees give way beneath him. With a strangled sob he sank down at the foot of the bed, and for an instant there was nothing but a dazzling whiteness swirling round and round inside his head. Then there was a dimming of the whiteness and then a grayness in which nothing moved and finally a blackness in which everything was blotted out.

Morning Edition

GOD, what a hangover he had! Just inserting a sheet of paper in the typewriter brought the sweat out on him, and his hands shook, and he had an impulse to send out for a pint of bourbon and mix himself the biggest pickup on record.

Waking up on the floor had been bad enough, but getting swayingly to his feet and finding that he had slept a part of the night on his bed without realizing it had given him the worst jolt of all. His long, angular body had left an impression on the sheets which he had taken great pains to smooth out before sending for an expressman.

Well, he had accomplished one thing. He had overcome his sentimental attachment to Mrs. Hammerslough's crumbly old brownstone and was now ensconced at the Ritz, where he would probably remain for the duration. At least, his trunks were there, and he'd soon be unpacking them.

And even if a herd of pink elephants *had* stampeded over him he was going to get his column out on schedule. He was very conscientious about his column, and he took a personal pride in it, and he'd be damned if he'd allow himself to skid along on his laurels.

Strands of hair hung up to dry on his doorstep, a corpse in his bed. He—he was lucky to be alive.

Acute alcoholism was no joke. Only last week a man of seventy out in New Jersey had accepted a challenge to drink a full pint in twenty minutes. It had been a very foolish thing to do, because he *might* have lived to be a hundred and six.

Better get on with it, boy! You're drawing eight hundred a week for a column

twelve inches tall. If you don't get on with it someone else will.

The corpse of *himself!* Once he had been so thoroughly skizzled he had smashed a window in a subway train while reciting Swinburne's *Faustine* to the girl on the next strap. But never had anything so ghastly as a still cold heebe-jeebe resembling his younger self parked itself in the middle of his bed.

Shuddering, he planted both his hands on his typewriter in approved touch system fashion, and began to twiddle his fingers. The clicking which ensued placed in capitals halfway down the page *Broadway Vignettes by Mike O'Hara,* and a paragraph which read:

What after-Pearl-Harbor deb gave what buck private playboy the runaround, oh, so recently, at the Pelican Club? And why did Peggy Sanderson of the Park Avenue and Palm Beach Sandersons, treat herself to a new escort at the very same table? And whose face, and I do mean face, will be red when he reads what your columnist—

He stopped typing abruptly and stared out of the window, one side of his face sagging down over his collar. When he read over what he had written he couldn't put his finger on a single phrase that wasn't worse than corny.

With an oath he tore out the sheet, crumpled it, and tossed it out the window. Perhaps a new start—

His jaw muscles twitching, he fed another sheet to the machine, and covered it with writing which had welled up from his subconscious so rapidly it *had* to be good. His fingers could hardly move fast enough. Almost he wept with relief as the lovely words came.

"Boy, you sure can write," he muttered to himself, elevating what he had written above the carriage and reading it over, slowly. It was—lousy.

Groaning, he arose and walked out of his office. The re-write din almost deafened him as he crossed the city room between earnest young men who were turning out flawless prose at a small fraction of his weekly salary.

He felt like climbing up on a chair and immersing his head in the cool green water cooler on the far side of the big, crowded city room. Approaching the cooler, he went through all the motions of doing that in his mind. A parched throat seemed to reach out ahead of his hands for the water he was presently siphoning into a lily cup.

Quaffing the cool, bubbling drink made him feel lots better immediately. He had thought up a substitute column for the lousy one he had left in his typewriter and was turning from the water cooler when—he saw it. It was nothing much, really, just one long, black hair on the sleeve of a coat which he had neglected to brush after wearing it the previous evening.

It was nothing much, but his own hair was gray, not black, and he could tell by the sheen of his hair that it had come from a much younger head.

Somehow he knew then what was expected of him. His face streaked with damp, his nose twitching, he returned across the city room to his office, and stood for an instant with his hand on a doorknob that seemed to twist in his clasp.

FOR an eternity he stood there, while his whole life seemed to pass in review as it had on the previous evening. Then a convulsive shudder shook him, and he opened the door wide.

Although the something which was sitting on his desk had planted both its hands on his typewriter in approved touch system fashion he could tell at a glance that it wasn't human. It hadn't any clothes on, and he could see right through it, and he knew that it was a spirit, and—it was watching him.

It was watching him out of cavernous eyes that seemed to grow larger and larger,

and suddenly it was getting up, and wiping its claws on its shaggy flanks.

It did not utter a sound, but he knew that it was annoyed because it had soiled its moist but hueless claws on a heavily inked typewriter ribbon. He could tell, he knew.

The air about him seemed to congeal, freezing him solid. As though through a pane of ice he saw the something flap its stoat-like ears, and ascend straight up toward the ceiling, its arms pressed to its side.

IN ALL his life he had never wanted so badly to scream, but he couldn't at all. Not even when the ceiling broke into bubbling froth, and the long legs of the creature left a hideous swirling in its wake.

Quite suddenly the ceiling became solid again, the ice dissolved, and a whispering swept across the office, as though an artery into Nowhere had begun to disgorge invisible elves.

"Hustle this down to the city room, little brother," a tiny voice shrilled. "It is the obituary of *Michael* O'Hara, written in person by the Peeper. He's the most accomplished keyhole columnist on *our* side, but for once he has forgotten to be clever."

"Was that really the Peeper, dark sisterkin? That uncouth, shaggy—"

"It would be a mistake to hold his appearance against him, little brother. When he is deeply moved he writes cadenced and flawless prose—like a silver river striking down to the sea between the cliffs of Inishowen. How he must have loved our Michael!"

"Poor, poor Michael. For three days he will lie in state—"

"Where, dark sisterkin?"

"Why, at the Royal Coach Inn on the Queen's Highway, of course."

"But otherwise known as Mrs. Hammerslough's boarding house."

"Only to mortals, little brother. And to Mike O'Hara, perhaps, who is standing there dead."

"Standing there dead?"

"Dead?"

"But see how he is trembling, little sisterkin! Surely a dead Mortal—"

"When a Mortal's young self lies in state the rest of him is but sound and fury signifying nothing."

"You mean—he will be pursued and cut down, little sisterkin?"

"Of course. The stalk *must* be severed when the wheat is dead."

It seemed to Mike O'Hara as though all the animation had been sucked out of his body, and that even the power to breathe had departed from his lungs.

But though his body felt like a hollow shell his vision was like that of a man experimenting with a new pair of glasses at the foot of the gallows. The brightness, the sharpness of everything seemed to increase, and for an instant it was given to him to see—five shadowy, misshapen little figures sitting astraddle his typewriter, swinging their legs and chattering away like evil gnomes in a doll house.

For perhaps five seconds he saw them. Then a mistiness seemed to swirl up over them, blotting them from view. With a strangled sob he turned, his hand fumbling for a doorknob that seemed to elude his grasp and recede from him through a shimmering veil of mist. . . .

He had no recollection of stumbling through the mist and out across the city room, and down two flights of stairs to the street. But he must have done so, for he presently found himself running. Hatless, coatless and along a street that seemed suddenly to converge upon him from all sides.

Unmistakably the street was converging and assuming the aspects of a charnel vault with dank, dripping walls, and the people he passed turned toward him dead, fleshless faces. He wanted to scream and couldn't, and he had to run faster to escape

from something that was pursuing him over the pavement.

He heard the something behind him, and tried to turn and couldn't, and then he was backing away from it up a long, dark alley and it was pursuing him with relentless speed.

"No, no!" he shrieked, backing faster and faster away as though a suction had seized hold of his coattails and was pulling him in a direction where everything was covered with graveyard mold.

It might have been better if he had not tried to escape, but had remained with his feet firmly planted on the dark, mouldy earth, for then it would have happened more quickly, and he would have been spared the torment of being overtaken at the bottom of a circular pit choked with corpses, and filled with the loathsome titterings of little dry-fleshed shapes which could only have been ghouls.

He saw the scythe for an instant, looming bright and sharp above the pallid charnel glow which hovered over the pit. For an instant he saw too the thing that had pursued him through the shadows—saw its huge, bony hands and the monstrous darkness where its face should have been.

Then—the scythe swung down toward him, and he felt the thrust of something that seemed to lift his head, and a wetness coughing up from his lungs.

He felt nothing more.

Final Edition

DR. HILLARY stood staring down at the dead columnist with troubled eyes.

Out beyond the city room typewriters clattered and telephones buzzed.

The young interne knew, of course, that the life of a newspaper took precedence over the death of even such a famous columnist as Mike O'Hara. But it seemed a little irreverent somehow, and it shocked him.

The city editor had closed the door, and Hillary was free now to speak his mind without exposing himself to a white blaze of publicity. The publicity would come and be a feather in his cap, for Mike O'Hara had been found dead under unusual circumstances—hunched in his chair before his typewriter, his arms outflung as though to ward off the blows of an invisible assailant.

The publicity would be fine for a young interne arriving in a hastily summoned ambulance a half-hour after O'Hara had been found like that. But now he wanted to speak his mind in a quiet way to just one intelligent individual, and the city editor seemed both intelligent and sympathetic.

"People *have* been scared to death," he said. "I don't claim it's common, but it *has* happened. There's a sudden shock, and the body tries to build up a foil of courage too—well, instantly. Too much adrenalin is poured into the blood-stream, and—"

"But what could have scared him?" the city editor wanted to know.

Hillary shrugged. "You're guess is as good as mine. Fright can be subjective, you know. Something he imagined—"

"Like that discoloration around his throat," the city editor suggested. "Now that we've started that line of thought, why not follow it through? He imagined there was a killer in here with a noose, and it made such an impression on him it did something to his throat."

Hillary returned the other's stare unflinchingly. "I'm almost sure that's a birthmark, but, of course—it mightn't be. There are a dozen post-mortem appearances it could be, all orthodox. There's no evidence of foul play, if that's what you're hinting at."

"You're not a medical examiner, Doc."

"No, I'm not. But I can assure you—"

"And you're not a psychiatrist," the city

editor said. As he spoke he tapped the smudged sheet of paper which projected from the dead man's typewriter.

"Look for Michael O'Hara below the cliffs of Inishowen, where the silver lark takes wing," he quoted. "Look for Mike O'Hara here, where he shall run from the Reaper, and be cut down.

"It's signed: 'The Peeper.'"

"What are you suggesting," Hillary asked.

THE city editor frowned. "Well, that's pure gibberish, isn't it? It sounds like the ravings of a lunatic. Mightn't O'Hara have had a brainstorm, tried to strangle himself, and succeeded in—well, fracturing his larynx, or something."

"It is physically impossible for a man to do that," Hillary said, with a wry grimace. "Besides, his larynx *isn't* fractured."

The city editor seemed not to hear him. He was staring intently down at the sheet of paper which contained the lines he had just characterized as the ravings of a lunatic.

"Say—that's strange!"

"Huh? What is?" Hilary wanted to know.

"Why, that smudge there. It looks exactly like a—a claw."

"Oh, nonsense," Hillary said, reaching over and ripping the sheet from the carriage.

For an instant he stared down at it, and then he stared at the city editor, and then back at the sheet again, all the blood draining from his face.

"Good Lord," he choked.

Between his shaking hands young Dr. Hillary held a sheet of paper on which there was not so much as a single typed line.

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The Marmot

By ALLISON V. HARDING

I HAVE never admired my brother. Edward Allis was a vain, selfish blusterer. He had no use for hard work, for ethics, and not much use for me. After a small family inheritance was divided between us, I didn't see much of him. I invested my share in a small business while Edward preferred to jog off for some exotic alien soil. Good riddance!

Still he was my brother, and when I got that agonized telegram, "Jim come quick. Need you. Desperate," I reacted the way any man would, I guess.

I hadn't seen Edward for quite some time, and the tone of the wire from my usually confident, self-sufficient kin puzzled and upset me. The address was in a city not more than a few hours distant and I was able to get there by the evening of that same day.

I remember the shock of surprise that hit me when I saw Edward. True, it had been two and a half years since I'd laid eyes on him, but a normal man shouldn't change as much as Edward had. He greeted me almost hysterically.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

Such a harmless looking tiny creature—but animals possess strange abilities well beyond our ken!

"My God, I'm glad you're here, Jim." His palm was moist with sweat as we shook hands.

"Well, Edward, what's this all about? You look done in!"

I noted that his rooms were comfortable, in an apartment of good taste. Without speaking, he motioned me absently to a chair. I sat down and looked up at my brother pacing in front of me. His small pig eyes that I had disliked in the old days, their furtiveness always a signal of some devilment, were dilated with fear now. I kept quiet, waiting for him to break the silence. His quick, nervous little movements stopped all of a sudden and he stood in front of me.

"Jim, the doctors tell me I'm, well, mad. They tell me I'm insane. They want me to go away somewhere to be treated."

I controlled my surprise and he made no comment. Edward went on.

"But it's outrageous!"

"It's not as simple as all that. I wish I could make you believe me."

"Start at the beginning," I suggested. "You and your affairs are strange to me after all this time."

EDWARD forced himself into a chair at my side. He had lost weight, I noted, and his once round, pouting face had thinned unbelievably.

"Look, Jim. I want you to go to see Dr. Jeffries. He's the man who's taking care of me. Oh, I've been to a lot of others, but he's supposed to be tops. You and I haven't always gotten along but you know I'm not crazy. You know that's absurd!"

"I don't understand. . . ." I started.

Edward hurried on, "You see I do have kind of an affliction, but it's a physical thing. It isn't mental. I know it isn't. I *know* it isn't!"

I cleared my throat. "What this boils down to, Ed, is that you want me to go to Dr. Jeffries and vouch for your sanity. Isn't that a little silly? I mean, what weight would my opinions have? I haven't laid eyes on you for, well, what's it been? Thirty months?"

Edward got up and came over to me. He gripped my arm in a nervous spasm. "Jim, at least go with me. Go with me to Dr. Jeffries tomorrow morning. We've never asked much of each other. This you've got to do for me."

I nodded wearily. "All right, Ed. Can you put me up here for the night?"

He smiled and patted me. "Sure, sure. I'm so glad you're staying."

I bedded down in the spare room next to Edward's room. I had brought some order blanks along and decided to study them after I got into bed. My business was still young, and I had a consuming interest in it.

I guess my concentration on these personal matters was so great that the noises from the next room grew into full-throated cries before I heard them. Without waiting to slipper my feet, I padded across the cold floor to the door leading into the adjoining room. It was unlocked and I burst into my brother's room. He was on top of his bed doubled over in agony. A strange, horrible whistling cry came from him. I reached him in a split second.

"For God's sake, Ed, what's wrong?"

I thought fleetingly of an acute appendicitis attack but then I saw he was gripping the upper part of his right leg. As I laid my hands on him, the paroxysms of pain seemed to pass. He shuddered beneath my grip and straightened from his jackknife posture, though still clutching his thigh. I stood helplessly alongside.

"You see! This is what they've been telling me is mental," he said in a voice weakened by his ordeal. "Mental! Get that, Jim? They tell me I'm imagining this thing."

"What thing?"

"This pain. This hideous something in my leg."

"In heaven's name, man, tell me what you mean."

Edward turned a look of horror and hopelessness toward me. He prodded his thigh.

"There's something in there, Jim. Something alive. Something that means to kill me!"

WE SAW Dr. Jeffries at 10 o'clock the next morning. The psychiatrist, for that is what he turned out to be, was an elderly man whose forceful personality could be felt the minute one stepped into his consultation room.

Edward immediately launched into a minute description concerning his attack of the previous night. He turned to me for corroboration. I nodded slowly. "Yes, I saw it, Doctor. Obviously my brother was in great pain."

Dr. Jeffries smiled kindly. "Of course, of course. He *is* in great pain, Mr. Allis, but the cause of that pain," he tapped his forehead significantly, "is *here*."

Edward's reaction to this announcement was immediate.

"It's impossible, impossible I tell you. I know what I feel. It *is* there! There's something there in my leg. I'll go elsewhere. I'll try another doctor."

Dr. Jeffries shook his head. "Do as you wish."

He looked directly at Edward. "Now I wonder if you'd mind if I had a few words with your brother."

Edward went ungracefully out of the room. After the door was shut again the physician turned to me.

"It's good that you're here to take care of him, Mr. Allis. Your brother is a very sick man."

"Won't you tell me the situation, Doctor? I know so little. I saw him last night for the first time in two and a half years. He's been away. Out of the country for a great deal of that time, I believe. I knew he traveled, but we never kept in touch."

"Then I probably know more about him, Mr. Allis, than you do. It's an interesting case. He doesn't make things easy for us. He should be under constant treatment."

I leaned forward. "I don't question your judgment on the case, Dr. Jeffries. However, as I said before, I saw this attack last night. I will swear that my brother was suffering hellish torture. Actual physical pain. He clutched his leg in agony and told me that there was something—that's what he said—something there that would destroy him."

"Precisely. That has been his story all along, Mr. Allis. Originally he went to general practitioners and made a fool of himself demanding X-rays and undergoing other clinical procedures. You know, the mind does many strange things. It can deceive us into believing that one part or another of our anatomy is the site of excruciating pain."

"You mean then that he really is insane?"

Dr. Jeffries tut-tutted. "Insane? What does that word mean? That is a loose ineffectual term at best. Perhaps all of us are a bit what the layman calls 'insane'. Let's say simply that your brother is in desperate need of care. He is distinctly a mental case."

"Well, what do we do, Doctor?"

Jeffries fiddled with the blotter on his desk. "Simple. He must be sent away somewhere where he can be under supervision. I recommend that you get Edward's consent so that we can send him to Harwood Home. He'll get excellent care there. If there is any hope of bringing him out of this condition, it lies in following such a course."

I CONSIDERED a few moments. "What you say seems to make good sense. Of course, I feel in fairness to my brother that I should get another opinion."

Jeffries smiled. "By all means, Mr. Allis. Edward has been to several other psychiatrists here in town. I am sure you will find they concur in my diagnosis. I have discussed his problem with them."

"Well, I guess that's good enough," I said after a moment's thought. "Tell me something else. Edward's phraseology was so strange last night. I was tired and the shock of being startled by his cries was terrific, but I found myself morbidly fascinated by his insistence that there was something in his leg. Doctor, he used the term 'something alive'."

"Oh, that's very simple, Mr. Allis. As a matter of fact, I found the key to that when I psychoanalyzed your brother some time ago. Under a sedative, hypnosis revealed a rather grisly little episode that took place during his travels abroad. I say 'grisly' advisedly, for frankly it is not complimentary to Edward's character. He's never even hinted at this story except, as I say, when under hypnotic influence."

"Go on," I urged eagerly.

"Well," started Dr. Jeffries. "You know that your brother liked to move around a lot. He was an adventurous greedy man, fond of collecting valuable curios and women's hearts, if he could. This is nothing new to you?"

I shook my head. "Edward has done many things I have disapproved of, Doctor. I know his shortcomings."

"You knew he went to Serbia?"

"Well, I knew vaguely he was going to that part of Europe."

"Well, in Serbia, Edward, pursuing his usual selfish objectives, had a most unfortunate experience with a Eurasian household of some standing and power in the community. Moreover, the episode must have made an abnormally powerful impression on his mind, for the details he revealed to me were minute.

"It seems that he became enamoured with the woman of a Eurasian. He courted her and apparently quite won her. One time, though, despite her cautions, he followed her home."

Dr. Jeffries shuffled some papers on his desk. "I took a very complete record of this impression. I have it here with Edward's case history."

He looked down. "Yes. Aside from beauty, this woman represented wealth. Edward, a little the worse for wear I believe, trailed her home one evening and broke into the Eurasian's house. Once inside, he stated to the ancient Eurasian master of the house that the woman must be his. Further, he began to help himself to any objects around the house that struck his fancy. The aged man, although a cripple, defied him and Edward struck him brutally. At this, the Eurasian began to pronounce certain unintelligible syllables that infuriated Edward even more.

"But Edward refused to retreat and instead laughed and poked fun at the old Eurasian calling him crazy and finally striking him again. At this point Edward became aware of a small animal. From his description I would say a tiny marmot. This creature was crouched at the ancient Eurasian's side. The Eurasion called to Edward that he would never have his woman or his valuables and that he, Edward, would be the one to go crazy. And of all he had, he was giving only his marmot to stay with Edward until he should lose his reason.

"At this, according to Edward's story, the marmot sprang at him and bit him severely in the thigh and then magically disappeared before Edward could kill the little creature. The pain of this knifed through Edward's drunkenness and he lurched out of the house with the Eurasian cackling in glee behind.

"He never returned to this place again. Apparently the whole episode filled him with a morbid superstitious dread so that he immediately left the country."

Jeffries raised his eyes from the case-history papers.

"Sounds like a good fiction story," I offered.

"A man of your brother's calibre could easily get into a scrape like that. He has fastened on that experience. He has a sense of guilt and superstitious fear about it."

"Well," I pushed, "what about this thing in his leg?"

"Don't you see?" said Dr. Jeffries. "He thinks the marmot's in his leg!"

I gasped. "It's strange," I mused after a minute. "The Eurasian's curse or whatever you want to call it seems to have come true. Edward *has* gone crazy."

Jeffries pursed his lips. "All that's nonsense. Your brother, because of the sort of life he's lived, and probably because of certain inherent qualities, is susceptible to the sort of nagging ill-suggestion that this constituted. You know, it's often been said and proved that the power of the voodoo curse lies in the morbid beliefs of the victims."

I saw his point. Jeffries went on.

"That's why he keeps insisting on physical examinations and X-rays. He even has suggested to me that we do an exploratory operation on his leg. Although he hasn't admitted it consciously, he's looking for the marmot."

"All right, Doctor. I guess I must agree with you. We've got to put him somewhere he'll be cared for, wherever you think."

Three of the hardest days of my life I spent trying to convince Edward of the necessity of going to Harwood Home. Finally, I succeeded, but only because Dr. Jeffries and I conceived the brilliant idea of suggesting that it might very well be advisable to open up the leg for an investigation, and this of course would require hospitalization.

Edward signed the necessary papers then without much difficulty. I saw him to the Home and satisfied myself that he would receive every care. Dr. Jeffries was still in charge and was to visit him several times a week. I intended to come over once in a while from my home.

It was three weeks later that I received Dr. Jeffries' summons. It was cryptic, bidding me come to Harwood Home as soon as possible.

When I arrived, Jeffries sent for me and explained at once the reason for his wire.

"It's not for a moment that I doubt our original diagnosis, Mr. Allis, but I thought you ought to know. Your brother is a very sick man physically now as well as mentally. These paroxysms of pain occur more often. He hardly ever eats. We keep him under sedatives as much as is possible. I thought I ought to explain to you before you see him. His appearance may be something of a shock to you."

I was glad he warned me, for I was braced lest I reveal to my brother any inkling of my surprise at his appearance. For he had wasted away to almost nothingness. His face had a pointed, hunted look, his nose seemed to have lengthened and sharpened, his ears and lips had a pinched bluish tinge. His eyes were bright with fever or eagerness to see me, I did not know which.

"Well, old man," I said with an attempt at heartiness. "Dr. Jeffries tells me you're not being such a good patient."

"Jim," he said. "It's been hell. Every day it's been worse." He frowned at the nurse fixing his water decanter until she left the room.

"Look. Look at this," and with a convulsive movement he pulled the blankets and sheet from his legs. I looked at his right thigh beneath the rolled-up pajama leg. This time with all my control, I

could not contain myself from starting. For his leg was swollen. It was purplish in color and swollen at the top.

"Don't you see?" he cried. "They're neglecting me. There's something horrible, I tell you. It's crawling right up my leg and they won't do anything about it. It's eating me from within!"

HIS voice rose in hysteria and a nurse bustled in from outside. I patted his shoulder and went out into the hall. Indignantly I demanded to see Dr. Jeffries and finally cornered him on a downstairs floor.

"What's the meaning of his leg?" I demanded. "Doctor, it's swollen. It looks wrong to me."

Jeffries frowned. "So you saw it. We're all aware of that, Mr. Allis. You know the mind does strange . . ."

"Mind be damned!" I said. "That's not imagination. He has a swelling there and that leg looks like there's poison in it."

"Hear me out, Mr. Allis. I must stick to my original diagnosis. Do you know, sir, that your brother spends almost the entire day prodding and kneading and poking that leg? He's obsessed with the idea that his leg is being eaten away. We have even allowed him the concession of another series of X-ray pictures here at the Home. They show no pathology, yet he insists there's something in his thigh. It's the marmot he's looking for, of course."

I was silent. Jeffries spoke again:

"Can you arrange to stay for a few days? It might be beneficial for Edward."

I agreed.

But it wasn't to be for a few days, for that night my brother died. I was at his bedside as was Dr. Jeffries when he passed away. So frenzied had been his convulsions, so fanatic his obsession that with his own hands he had torn cruelly at his already swollen leg, drawing blood. In his weakened, near-starved state, the anguish and agony of those last few moments were too much for him. I remember my disgust as I sat at his bedside. The loosely hanging bed clothes were wet with blood from his final throes. My brother had been a stark mad man the last few minutes of his life. I got up finally with Dr. Jeffries to leave the room.

We were alone then for a minute, and we walked toward the door, his hand on my shoulder.

"Maybe it's better this way, Mr. Allis."

I opened my mouth to speak when my eye caught a slight movement in the dark far corner of the room. I moved closer, Jeffries still at my side. I looked, and a feeling of chill liquid horror stole through me until my scalp crawled with an unearthly dampness. For there, crouched in the corner was a tiny yet stout-bodied, short-legged little creature, its coarse fur matted with blood from small ears to short bushy tail. It just sat there silently observing us.

I gasped then and reeled into the hall I felt rather than saw Jeffries still beside me. Outside I turned and looked at him. His face was green-gray with pallor. But neither of us spoke. Thinking it over afterward, that fact doesn't seem strange, for God knows I value my sanity above everything else in the world!

Reunion

By RAY BRADBURY

Three trunks—like coffins—each containing the magic symbols of three people he had never seen.

EVERY Monday morning the clugging clamor on the back-porch, the quaking of the house in every old cranny and joint, signified that the ritual of clothes-washing had begun.

The clothes would lie in brilliant mounds, sorted out, ready to be dispatched into the cauldron where the metal clunkers went up and down with a *eeee-aww—eeee-aww* noise, and the sound of much thrashing water. Within that electrified machine the surgings would be unbeliev-

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

able, as the clothes swam about, were submerged by merciless attacks of the plungers. They seemed almost alive, floundering their empty sleeves, bobbing their deserted necks and showing, without so much as a blush, their underskirts. The mad bubbling continued until late afternoon. Then the wind snapped a long regiment of materials upon wire lines under the blossoming apple trees.

It was Malcolm Briar's duty to fetch soap chips from the cellar, or gather spilled clothes-pins, and keep his mouth shut, being careful not to raise dust to spoil the wind-flapped linens. Malcolm scuttled about the yard obedient to every shrill order of his Aunt Opie, but secretly rebelling against her ordinances.

So here it was—a particular Monday. Aunt Opie, her mouth chocked with clothes-pins, wiped the lines clean with a rag, and began hanging clothes. But Malcolm, nicknamed Mal, sought refuge in the attic of the large old house on Oak Street; this very same house where his Mom and Dad had lived before their deaths.

He heard Aunt Opie shrilling down in the yard. Her voice was like the pump-handle's creaking sound in the kitchen.

"Mal! Oh, Mal, oh, Mal!"

Mal surveyed his kingdom below through a small hole in the dusty attic window. Aunt Opie kept calling, "Mal!"

Mal giggled. She would never find him up here. This was the Robber's Roost. None could enter except those who rapped and softly enunciated "Hing-a-ding-a-rock-in-my-shoe!"

About him were the collected paraphernalia of fifty years of living and dying. All the implements, the unnecessaries, the frills, the nick-nacks collected, shelved and tucked away by aging humans when they no longer served a purpose.

Small tinker-toys of babies now grown into cynics with their own babies. High-chairs gathering dust, offering seating space for fat, lazy old spiders who sat grayly and rarely considered the effort of spinning a regular web.

Neat stacks, leaned against the odorous walls, were pictures of the family: Mom and Pop, Grandma and Grandpa, great-grandparents, cousins, and his brother David, who had died aged seven.

The great brown trunks with the metal hasps on them. If you blew your breath and wiped the hasps they would gleam like sudden brass stars in the attic night. And if you pulled up on the hasps, the trunk mouth gaped open, and the odor of milennial mothballs would spring outward into your nostrils. With it would come the odor that memory imparts to a room, an odor all its own.

Here, Mal seemed happiest.

DOWNSTAIRS, where Uncle Walter sat, a pallid thin old insect of an invalid, with his feet from day to day in boiling waters and ice waters, it was not fun. Years had stamped Aunt Opie into an irrevocable, stern mold; here whalebone corset tightened in her shape, just as Uncle Walter had tightened in her life.

"Mal!"

Mal listened. He heard the washing machine's ominous thunder still alive down below in the sunlight world, and if you listened closer, the hacking choke of Uncle Walter.

Inserting small hands into the clothes stacked inside one great old trunk, Mal found, first of all, his baby clothes. Clothes that he had once worn himself, before that part of him that was younger, smaller and uneducated, had died. For it was like dying, seeing these clothes—it seemed impossible he could ever have inhabited them. Now he was eleven and could not hope to retrogress backward to those squalling days, and he was amazed that he had survived being so infinitesimal.

Discarding that, Mal next seized upon

his brother's clothes. A fine gray little suit, with a gray cap that had fitted snugly upon David's handsome head, he imagined. But now David could not use it. He was captured in wood, like a fly in amber, prisoned deep in Rose Lawn cemetery forevermore. On Memorial Day, Mal would walk upon David's real estate at that cemetery, give him a fistful of flowers and want to hear him laugh or talk.

Next, Dad's old walking cane. Inscriptions on it from some mystical lodge. Next to it an old rubber football nose-guard Dad had worn over his face when he was in college.

"Oh, Dad, Dad, what were you like? Dad, Dad, what were you like?"

Dad was a picture in an oaken frame; a young, handsome man with twinkling eyes and a high, clutching collar.

Mother wore her hair in a soft pompadour and showed her teeth, which were small, feminine—like white kernels of close-set corn.

Just pictures. Clothes, doodads, things collected in an old attic.

Here was a net blouse, yellowed by time, that Mother had worn perhaps to a card party, or to play Mah-Jong, or to see a stage-play of *Hamlet* with John Barrymore, maybe.

"Oh, Mom, Mom! Where are you? What were *you* like? Mom!"

The tears would roll in soft streaks down his face. And his crying would be mellowed by the very understanding garret, who had seen all things, even tears, shelved and forgotten and gathering dust.

Mal was hungry.

It was lunchtime, and the rollers of Uncle Walter's wheelchair rolled soft rubber through the hall three stories below. Momentarily, the pound of the washing machine was snapped into silence.

Replacing the clothes, stacking the memories neatly back into place, hasping the trunk, wiping his eyes, Mal descended softly downstairs to acknowledge the threats and tongue-lashing that would accompany his lunch.

"Oh, THERE you are, Malcolm!"

AFTER lunch, when Uncle Walter had retreated to his room to snore away the hot afternoon, Mal helped snatch clothes from the line, toss them into baskets and deposit them before an iron in the kitchen that would hiss if you spit at it.

Aunt Opie would iron all afternoon and he would help. In the early summer evening he would be allowed an hour to play with the neighborhood kids "until it gets dark, then come straight home, and don't go near the river."

Mal sat there.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" snapped Aunt Opie, wiping the supper plates dry at the sink.

"What, Aunt Opie?"

"Go and play," she said, exasperated. "Honestly, you're more trouble than all my money. You're an awful waste of flesh."

"Am I, Aunt Opie?"

"Yes, you are." She moved about in the pantry. "I get so tired of having you under foot.

"I guess I'm not much use," said Mal, staring straight ahead, stricken with that helpless, constricting thought. "Why are people born, anyway. Aunt Opie?"

"To keep undertakers busy. Now go out of the house and play."

"I'm too tired."

"Go up to bed, then."

"I'm too tired to go to bed."

"That's a silly thing to say."

The screen door slammed behind him.

"Don't slam the door, Mal!"

He walked slowly across the porch.

"And don't scuff your shoes that way. Wear out the heels a month ahead of time."

Snap.

The next he knew he was upstairs. He did not remember the instant when the decision had come like the sun falling in his lap. He didn't recall charging through the house on his way up to his room. He found himself now, crying without tears, assembling before himself on his bed all of his worldly possessions.

His marbles, his handkerchiefs, his shirts and overalls, his pencils and books, everything and anything. He put it all in big paper sacks.

THE sun was just going down when he let himself out of his room. In a few moments Aunt Opie would blow her whistle—the silver one with the marble inside that fluttered like a captive bird when blown upon—and call his name.

"Mal!"

There. She was calling now.

"Mal!"

He climbed rickety stairs in almost total darkness, to let himself into the hot, thick, ancient, but friendly, smell of the attic.

"Mal!"

Aunt Opie's voice was so far away it was a dream. The other world, below, no longer existed. It was put away and dead.

Mal opened the nearest trunk. He buried his clothes in it, deep. Deep down into the years, where all things that will never be used again are buried. Stacked neat, his shirts by his father's and his brother's shirts. His small cap by David's cap. His shoes side by side with mother's shoes. His trinkets dumped into the cache of all Time's trinkets.

Then he got out Dad's picture and Mom's picture again.

He carried them to the tiny hole in the dirty window. There was a light-beam so tiny it was almost like web spun from the machinery of a golden spider. That beam picked out one last smile from Mom, one last understanding twinkle of Dad's eyes.

Quite suddenly, the light-beam vanished. There was nothing but a reactive image in the darkness of those eyes, and that smile. They hung in mid-air. They would not go away.

"Mom! Dad, what were you like? Wouldn't you like to see how I turned out?" A long pause. "Huh?" A long pause. "Wouldn'tcha?" A long pause. "Mom." A long pause. "Dad?"

Something shifted in the dark.

"I only want to be up here with you. There's so much of you up here. All the things you were. If I could put them together—maybe—I could make you again. Maybe you'd live again!"

It was true. Deep in these trunks Mal could imagine every sweat droplet ever shed by Dad, every molecule of flesh that had ever slipped from his fingers, a little cell of skin, a little fragment of fingernail. The under-arms of the coats, where the good animal sweat of Dad had been expelled and absorbed and kept in summer and winter. It was all there. The clothing was Dad. Besides that, people are like reptiles shedding skin, but in different ways—in small shards, in microscopic bits. They would be here, too, those little unseeable bits. All in the trunks. Here in the attic. Dad. Here and now! Mom. Here and now! David, too.

Mal trembled violently. From now on he'd stay up here. He'd never go downstairs. He wanted to stay up here, with them. To be one of them, and waste away and waste away into vanishing. Until he was nothing more than a picture stacked against the wall; a bundle of folded clothing, a scatter of childish toys.

This was only the beginning of an adventure. Why, there had been no living yet, at all. That would come as each hour advanced and he groped nearer toward the reality of Mom and Dad and David.

He trembled like a candle-flame in a breeze. He was almost blown out by the violent storm inside himself.

Sorting out all of Mom's things, he examined them. Thread by thread, button by button, caressing and kissing and understanding them. He put her picture amid them. Her jewelry, her beads, her rings, and a few pitiful compacts of dried, musty cosmetic.

Symbols. Her symbols. And with these symbols, like a young witch or sorcerer, laying them out in designs on the attic floor, and talking to them, and chanting over them in a childish piping, perhaps he could summon back one or all of those loved ones from their deep moist graves!

Three trunks. Like coffins. Each containing the accumulated magic symbols of three people he had never seen except in his brain.

He threw open all three trunks at once.

ALL THREE!

"MAL!"

Early morning. A week later. Maybe a month. Maybe even ten years later. Maybe fifteen years.

"Mal!" Aunt Opie, on the green lawn, shouted and blew the silver whistle. Despairing, she thumped into the house, perhaps to pick up the phone.

If she called the police, well, Mal didn't care. He sat up here and laughed a little while things evolved toward that final phase. Things were working right. He had no fear, nothing but a calm, certain assurance that everything would be all right.

Already he was part of the discarded things. One of those useless objects, as Aunt Opie had labeled him, best thrown in the garret, framework for spiders to build gray tapestry on. He was fitting in already, sinking into the dark, becoming a shadow, becoming like Mom and Dad. Just a picture, just darkness, just clothes, just baubles, just memories. It would take a little time, that was all.

He had not eaten. Hunger was not in him, nor room for hunger. It was simply enough to be up here. His face must by now be filthy black, his clothes in a horrible state, his body in even more of a thinned, neglected condition. Just a little longer.

He watched the hours crawl by like bright animals.

He began to get more and more sensitive to the place. Now, at last, the fulfilment. Dad and Mom and David and he. One large, rollicking family!

From the odors, from the perfumes imbedded in pyramids of clothing, from the pictures, from the furniture they had sat in, from books in yellow piles, now came Dad and Mom and David! To meet him, to meet him, to join hands, to kiss him, to hold him, to laugh with him! Laugh and dance and sing!

"Dad! Mom! I'm so glad to see you! To really see you! I knew if I kept trying, I could do it. It's like magic! Oh, are you really here? Mom, Dad!"

They were there.

Mal felt tears of happiness warm on his face.

And then the darkness was split down the middle by a great knife of fresh daylight.

Mal screamed.

THE door leading upward into the attic was thrown open and coming up the daylight knife was the stern stiff figure of Aunt Opie!

"Mal? Mal, is that you? Mal? Are you up here?"

Again Mal screamed.

"Mom, Dad, don't go away! Mom, Dad, David!"

Daylight infested the attic. Mal rolled upon the floor in a tangled skein of clothes

and baubles. Aunt Opie darted forward.

"Have you been up here for four days? You worried us that long! Mercy God Almighty, Malcolm Briar, look at you. LOOK at you! LOOK AT YOU!"

She grabbed him, twisted him toward the door. Daylight hurt his eyes and he stumbled.

"Walter!" cried Aunt Opie. "Walter, come see where I found him!"

It was insane. The very last of it all. No matter how Mal screamed, babbled, cried out, carried on, or tried to attack Aunt Opie, her mind was made up.

Spring cleaning.

The attic was emptied of all its dark treasure. The baubles were thrown heartlessly into an incinerator. The pictures were sold for their valuable frames.

But impossible of all impossibilities, was the washing-machine churning, churning on the back porch. Inside the washing-machine, all the writhing clothes that had belonged to Mom and Dad and David! Churning, jumping, frothing, shuddering. Dad's shirts. Mom's blouses. David's play-suits!

All of the magic, the memory, the symbolism being washed, churned, beaten, soaked, twisted and laved out by the merciless metal plungers and the acid soap and the slushing water!

All of the precious long ago, the sweet immortal perfumes damned by lysol and water.

All the tiny flakes of living and memory now castrated, cleansed, put asunder and drowned!

And the clothes, as they came, one by one from the machine, hung like empty corpses, no more to live, no more life to them, on the line beneath the blossoming apple trees, swaying in a slow, hot wind.

Mal collapsed, twisting in Aunt Opie's hard hands. He screamed and screamed, crying out his heart and his lungs and weakly sobbing into an insane hysteria.

"Mom, Dad, David, don't go away! Don't, oh, don't!"

Sinking into a nauseated darkness, the last sound he heard was the merciless thrashing, plunging, gurgling of the washing-machine, killing, stomping, pounding, *down and around and down. . . .*

Tragic Magic

By HANNES BOK

THIS is a story in which we *want* you to feel sorry for the villainess —who happened to be a witch— because she was such a *dope.*

There are scientific-minded people who claim that if it were not for the persistence of witchcraft through the ages we would have no Science at all today; which is true enough. Witchcraft is the mother of our present Science.

Then a few of these scientific-minded people go a little farther to declare that Witchcraft is in itself a Science—a dark, secret kind of science, based on natural laws not yet generally comprehended. But your author claims that if witchcraft is any science at all, it is simple psychology. Take the case of Marina Bustamente, for instance—she who is to be our villainess.

She was born of Cuban parents, and bred—well, not exactly *bred*—in the city of her birth, New York. Public- and high-school records show that she was not a particularly bright student; neither was she

Scientifically-minded people declare that witchcraft is in itself a kind of science—a dark, secret kind!

Heading also by HANNES BOK

stupid. One of her teachers, a Miss Parell, recalls, "She was just like any other Latin girl—mischievous, slightly too interested in the boys of her class, with a penchant for clashing color effects and heavy perfume." So far, Marina does not differ noticeably from any other school girl of the slums.

What made the difference, unalterably affecting her life, was—"The Spanish Market." On upper Park Avenue, bounding Harlem on one side and the Latin section on the other, runs an elevated railway. Under it, for perhaps five or six blocks, the Spanish Market is located, housed in from rain and cold, with not very many windows—a series of long corridors lined with stalls, artificially lighted, and glittering as any Bagdad bazaar.

Here are piled fruits and vegetables, many of them imported from the tropics to satisfy the nostalgic demands of West Indians—things like dahlia roots, spiky vegetables that are definitely *not* artichokes, red bananas, blood-oranges.

Meat, and fish; stalls of paper flowers, little cubbies spilling out gaudy, bespangled silks and rayons, imitation leopard and zebra skins—candy and—well, you *might* say, spices.

At the time, a certain Jerry presided over a candy counter. He was tall and slim, and gorgeously dark in his comeliness—probably eighteen or so. All of Marina's female schoolmates were attracted to this Jerry, who basked in their adoration, and they made frequent pilgrimages to the Market, ostensibly to purchase sweets, in reality to stare, blush, and giggle, and to murmur ecstatically, when they had left the spot, "Wasn't he *handsome* today?"—in Spanish, of course.

And Marina was every bit as enamored as any of them. Jerry—the acme of all manhood, the culmination of all Evolution—was, if not in all her dreams, certainly in a good many of them. And, since Marina's parents had little money to give her for sweetmeats, she had to invent excuses to go to the candy counter—or at least near it. So she frequently stopped at the spice counter just opposite Jerry's booth—and Mother Nunez, who sold the spices, became interested in the girl.

MOTHER NUNEZ—a wrinkled dried-apple of a woman, round everywhere and yet shriveled, was—a witch. Everyone knew it, and nobody minded. To her came little children with notes from mothers—notes complaining of headaches, and minor ailments. The witch would compound a prescription from her spices, and send the child packing. She was a midwife, too, and those who understood Spanish often heard a good many obstretrical details from worried women who came to the old one for advice. No, Mother Nunez was generally accepted, and not much feared.

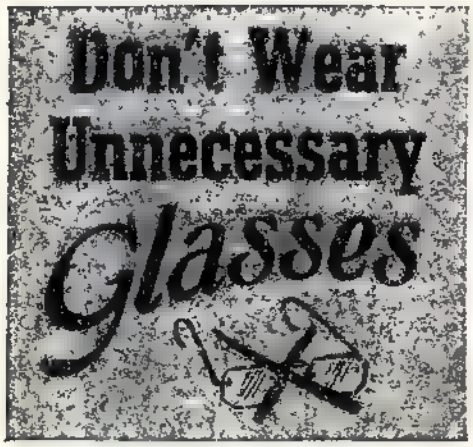
Once, smiling grotesquely at Marina, the witch observed, "My daughter, you languish for the love of that stripling? But you are young!" And she cast an eye toward Jerry which, despite the bleariness of age, was appreciative.

"Ah, my misery!" Marina replied, with a sigh that rattled grains of copal incense in their shallow pans. "Old mother, I am consumed—*consumed*—for love of him! What is my age? What does it matter? In my heart, I am a woman."

"But you are too bashful!" the witch objected. "Go to him—speak to him. Inquire after the health of his family."

Marina darkened to a most interesting scarlet. "Oh, no!" she gasped, clutching her throat as though she were strangling. "I—couldn't! I'd *die!*"

"Tut!" the witch exclaimed, and dipped a hand into a jar filled with powdered violets. "Take some of these"—she popped them rustling into a worn brown-paper bag—"and put them into the water in



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which you bathe. They will make you smell sweet—sweeter than his confections. Maybe then he will notice you."

Marina stammered rapturous thanks, and hurried home to bathe. The withered pale petals softened in the hot water to their original shape, almost their original color. And yes, they *did* smell good! Though there was a little inconvenience: Marina emerging from the bathtub, plastered with clinging petals, like Venus arising from the waves, modest in seaweed.

But the violets had no great effect on Jerry, as Marina needlessly confided to Mother Nunez, who had eyes to see. So the old woman, one hand clutching her shawl, dipped the other hastily under her counter, her eyes shifting nervously about; she whisked up a small bottle, which she whipped into Marina's hand—and then, forgetting the shawl, she used both hands to wrap Marina's fingers concealingly and tightly about the vial.

"Try this!" she hissed, very softly. "Talk with him—get him to drink some of it!" And then she drew back and fussed with a boxful of candles—red, orange, purple, and black.

True, Marina considered the possibilities of persuading Jerry to drink the potion—but they were extremely remote. One does not walk up to a stranger and say, "Drink this!"

So the philter went unused.

But—Jerry had seen the bottle change hands, and the witch's eyes on himself. He was a little worried. A matter of psychology! So that he smiled kindly at Marina's next appearance, and—psychology again!—Marina decided that the philter was so potent that she had merely to carry it about with her for it to be, in some measure, at least, effective.

THIS interested her in witchcraft. Mother Nunez, who was growing no younger, thought that an apprentice might be useful, and assigned the role to Marina. As for Jerry, when Marina discovered that

he had married at sixteen, she lost interest in him.

Marina's parents did not quite sanction the idea of Marina taking over Mother Nunez's duties in the Market, but then—was not money needed? And so—Marina became an excellent witch.

But—a modern witch. A modern girl practicing a medieval art, a thing as incongruous to the age in which she lived as Julius Caesar scratching a match with a flourish, and lighting a stogie.

She was not especially pretty. But men swarmed to her. Some she loved, some not. The thing is that they took her about to plays, to concerts, to social functions, so that, in time, when Mother Nunez was dead and gone, she was an entirely different Marina Bustamante than before—well-clothed, well-mannered, no trace of an accent in her speech, and practicing her sorceries in her Madison Avenue apartment, bolstered by the legend that she was a refugee gypsy princess. Society dowagers, debutantes, sub-debs, flocked to her and paid her well.

And she fell in love.

His name was Jerry, too. Jerome Aspingwell Burton the Third. Young, blonde, not very tall, but very good-looking. And—rich! Marina went yachting with him, went to the races with him. . . . But he did not love her; he was very interested in a certain Florida damsel, and looked upon Marina as a charming companion, a bit gauche, but amusing, and wonderful at telling fortunes at cards.

So Marina invited him up to her apartment for a drink—in which drink she spilled a few drops of love potion. But since Jerome Aspingwell Burton had already imbibed too freely, when she brought him the glass to drain she found him comfortably asleep on her sofa.

She stood with the glass in her hand, looking down at him—at the soft fair hair, the lips which looked as if they knew their business, the fine, slender hands.

Then she set down the glass, hurried

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into her boudoir, and emerged with a pair of manicure scissors.

She snipped off a bit of his hair and laid it aside; her nimble finger extricated his handkerchief from his hip pocket. She eyed the square of linen; he had used it—good! For further certainty she wiped his mouth with it, moistening it slightly with his saliva. It was in her mind to make a wax doll in his likeness, incorporating his hair, a bit of handkerchief and other personal mementos within it.

It was an old, old form of witchcraft—but certain. More certain than a love potion whose effects soon wore off. With a doll she could make him love her. What befell the doll would befall him. All well and good.

Jerome awoke while she was snipping off a curve of fingernail, and her heart stumbled. Did he know what she was doing? But he smiled vacuously, said, "Hangnail?" and went back to sleep.

There! Now she had all the necessary ingredients!

She did not make the doll immediately; that could wait. She spent the night seated beside Jerome on the sofa, poring lovingly over him, one hand patting his light hair. He was waked by the telephone ringing—someone wishing to make an appointment for a "psychic reading" — early in the morning, and raised himself up on an elbow. He stared uncomprehendingly around. Then he realized that he was not at home, in his own bed. He said to Marina, who was putting down the telephone, "Holy cats! Don't tell me I was here all night?"

"But yes," she said, smiling at the dear remembrance of him—so boyish! so attractive—slumbering on the sofa.

He sat bolt upright, and then put a hand to his brow. "Wow! My head! Listen, Marina—I was a gentleman, wasn't I—I hope?"

"Yes," she said regretfully.

"Well, but listen—" He gulped, and hid his eyes from hers. "Well, I'm aw-

fully sorry. Good grief, if Diana ever thought—" He stretched earnest hands toward her. "You won't say anything about this to anyone, now, will you?"

She frowned.

He added hurriedly, "If Diana ever thought—you see, we're engaged, nothing must happen to separate us, and Diana s fearfully jealous—"

"Diana?" she asked, the frown accentuating.

"She's so wonderful—" He described her for two full minutes.

THAT meant that he was in love. Marina was in a fine position for blackmailing him, but she was clever enough to realize that if she announced his staying overnight would alienate this Diana from him, it would also link him closer to her. If, loving Diana, Jerome lost her, he would spend the rest of his life regretting it. He might marry, but he would never love his wife; he would be yearning for his lost love for Diana. No, Marina wanted Jerome. But she wanted him only if he loved her. So she would keep quiet, all right.

"*I'm* not jealous!" she said with asperity.

He spared her a few second's attention from his throbbing head. "I shouldn't have drunk so much—what's that? Well, why *should* you be jealous?"

"It's never occurred to you, then, that I might be in love with you?"

"You!" he exclaimed—but there was no need to proceed further, for that "You!" was filled with volumes of meaning. He might as well have added, "My dear, I am Jerome Aspingwell Burton the Third, and you—though you may be interesting in a casual way—you're a nobody from nowhere with a forged background. You loving me is perfectly ridiculous!"

At that moment she hated him—hated him while she flushed with shame from hurt pride, from disgust with her own lack of insight. Of course! He could never love her! She could feed him the potion,

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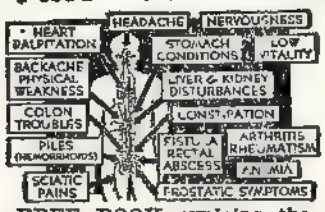

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and he would come to her—but not really loving her. Not because it was in his heart to love her. And if she made the doll and forced him to kiss her, caress her—it would not be the real Jerome who did the kissing and caressing. It would be a hollow shell—Jerome's image, not his personality.

And like all women, she wanted to be loved for herself, not because she was a sorceress.

She had imagined that, instigated by the potion or the doll, he would come to her, not really loving her at first. But gradually love would sprout within him. And he would be hers.

But that "You!" made it impossible. He loved Diana: even if she could remove Diana from her path, that "You!" with all its latent disgust and condescending—*that* could never be surmounted.

So she hated him. Thoroughly, vigorously. All right. He had hurt her; she would be revenged. Vendetta. Blood vengeance.

She had the hair, the spittle on the handkerchief, the nail parings. She would make the doll, and torture it, thereby torturing *him*.

But she did not make the doll at once. That could wait until Jerome was happily married, to make his misery the more complete.

As a matter of fact, her revenge waited for a considerable number of years. Jerome went to Florida, was married, quite happy, but—he ran for Congress and was elected. Good! Now was the time to strike!—Marina had avidly followed his career, treasuring the yellowing newspapers, handling them until they were ragged. But wait! Suppose he ran for president? Suppose he succeeded? *Then*—a mad president—someone failing at the most crucial moment of his nation's history, the instant when he was most needed!—*that* would be revenge indeed! She had merely to torture the doll to torture him,

or put it in a mad environment to make him mad.

So she waited further.

And Jerome did become President. And did nicely, too. The nation was wild about him. Mrs. Richgelt, the man on the street, even Bowery bums were wild about him. And Marina smiled. Good! He'd be sorry that ever he was born!

It must have been nine years when she found the time ripe. He was to make a good-will tour of the South Americas, and while he was on that tour—she would see to it! — he would disgrace himself and through him, his country. He would die of shame. His shame would burn a thousand times worse than hers, flouted by him.

The doll-magic worked. That she knew. She had—well, call it experimented, and none too kindly, on some of her clients. She had found that it worked best if her clients knew what she was doing. They did not have to believe that she was really a witch—but the thought of it disturbed them—they *wondered*. Psychology. And she would let Jerome know what she was doing. He believed in her—he had seen her at work; he had been astounded by her card-readings and her seeming clairvoyance.

It was foolproof. He embarked on his voyage. She went to a church, pretended to pray, and in the absence of close scrutiny, stole a candle. She made the doll, murmured the blasphemous baptism over it, and proceeded to do that which is best left to the imagination—that which she knew would shock delicate minded South Americans. And then she sat back and waited for the headlines.

Poor woman! The headlines were anything but what she expected. Jerome was doing fine in South America. No hint of trouble at all! Were the newspapers lying, then? Covering up for him? If so, her revenge had failed!

She tried again, desperately—but still the news reports were anything but gratify-

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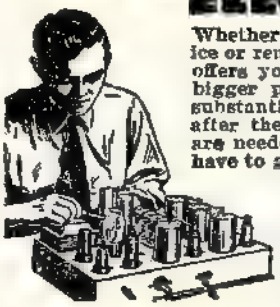

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ing. There was no doubt about it. Her vengeance indeed had been thwarted.

We say it again—poor woman!

It completely demoralized her. She took to drink and all manner of indulgence to alleviate her downfall—lost all her customers and had to vacate her gorgeous apartment.

She did not return to the environment which she had grown to hate. She completely disappeared.

Suicide—perhaps?

But it all boils down to her lack of Science. Witchcraft may be a science—but certainly a crude one. Almost any high school student who has studied physiology will be able to tell you that the body changes completely, inside and out, every seven years. The personality persists, the face may *seem* the same—but the body changes completely, yes!—once every seven years. Gradually, yes — but changes all the same. Don't let's quibble.

And she had waited for nine years!

By that time, his "new" body had nothing at all in relation to the old nail parings, lock of hair, and spittle. Her magic might have worked years ago, but now it was too late.

But she did not know that. Her witchcraft had not informed her.

So you can believe in witchcraft if you like.

But me—I'm a skeptic.

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by Robert Bloch
• May WEIRD TALES •

Nearing the Century Mark

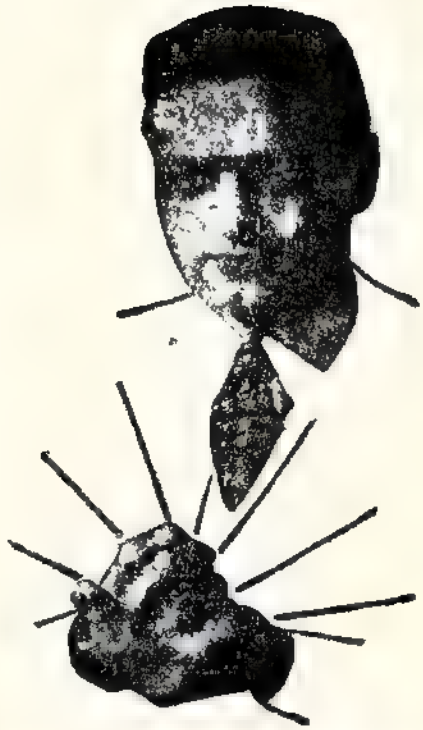
AUGUST DERLETH informs us that *The Trail of Cthulhu* is close to his 100th tale in WEIRD TALES. We knew the number of Derleth yarns published in WEIRD was high but this sent us to our records for the exact figure—an amazing 95.

But it seems to us that another interesting feature in a most interesting career is that in addition to taking such good care of WEIRD TALES, August Derleth has written 30 books and contributed to over 200 other magazines ranging from *The Yale Review* to *Redbook*. He also is literary editor of a newspaper and guiding light of Arkham House.

Here's Mr. Derleth speaking for himself:

"I should make it clear that I am *not* claiming that the mantle of Lovecraft has fallen upon my shoulders. It is only that, having worked with HPL's materials and works for so long in connection with Arkham House, I am at last heeding his admonition to develop the vein he opened. The Trail of Cthulhu is one result, and The Dweller in Darkness (to appear in an early issue of WEIRD TALES) is another. If WEIRD TALES fans like these efforts, they need only say so, and there will be others. . . . WEIRD TALES bought my first story back in 1925, and for a while was my only market. I was 15 then, and 16 when the story was published (*Bat's Belfry* in the May, 1926, issue). Since then I have contributed to the magazine regularly . . . and as long as there is a WEIRD TALES, I hope it will continue to carry my work in its pages. I have always had for the magazine the strongest imaginable feeling of loyalty."

August Derleth



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A Detachable Psychic Entity?

ALONG with this story, *The Shoes of Judge Nichols*, Stanton A. Coblentz sent us the following interesting lines from his home in California.

Mr. Coblentz says:

Although I have written more stories in the pseudo-science than in the weird field, I have long been interested in stories in the latter category. Many years ago I devoured avidly the tales of Poe, Fitz-James O'Brien, Ambrose Bierce and other writers of grisly and macabre narratives. A little later, became intensely interested in the subject of psychic phenomena—to such an extent that my book, *The Answer of the Ages* (New York, 1931), is a study of beliefs and phenomena connected with death throughout the centuries, but with emphasis on modern psychical research. It has long been my belief that the psychic universe is largely unexplored and unknown, and consequently provides boundless territory for the imaginative writer of fiction. My belief has been furthered not only by some experiences of my own that have not followed strictly orthodox theories of sense perception, but by observation of my wife, who for years has done automatic writing, often of an astonishing nature—as when she has taken down scintillating epigrams and even passages of rhymed poetry as fast as her hand would write. A story like *The Shoes of Judge Nichols* is, however, not the result of anything that has ever come within my personal observation, but of the thought that if there is a detachable psychic entity in man—as I believe there is—it might under certain circumstances be possible for the mind of one man to enter the body of another, with results that might be either tragic or comic. In this case I did not choose to take the tragic point of view—for may not weird experiences result in amusing quite as often as in disastrous episodes?

Stanton A. Coblentz

Best Stories Have Merry Side

MISS EVA-JANE COFFEY sends word from Victoria, B. C.:

"I most decidedly disagree with Mr. Richard Tooker, of Phoenix, Arizona, who does not think humor should appear in weird tales. I never miss a WEIRD TALES and I am

sure that the readers will agree that some of the best stories have had their merry side.

"*Under Your Spell* in July's issue is my favorite and I would say it certainly contains a number of worthwhile laughs.

"There are others in the top list, of course, but this is to testify that humor goes hand-in-hand with fantasy and at least one story of this kind should be included in every magazine."

Miss Eva-Jane Coffey

Where or When

Franklin J. Owen, Jr., writes us from New York City:

In regard to the idea expressed by Seabury Quinn in his story *Louella Goes Home* that a person can visualize a place that they have never actually seen, I believe that it is possible for the following reason.

For many years Mrs. Owen mentioned and described the interior of an old New York mansion, furniture, pictures, stairways, etc. She had never entered this dwelling and, in fact, did not know it really existed.

Eventually she was invited to visit the home of a lawyer who was world famous during the "Gay 90's" and sure enough the interior of this place was exactly as she had always "seen" it.

Possibly there is an explanation to all this . . . but what?

READERS' VOTE

THE TRAIL OF CTHULHU
THE UNBELIEVER
HOOFS
THE SHOES OF JUDGE NICHOLS
FROM THE HOUSE OF THE RAT CATCHER
THE PEEPER
THE MARMOT
REUNION
TRAGIC MAGIC

Here's a list of nine stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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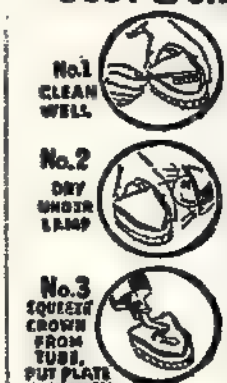

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• This is your club — a medium to help you get together with other fantasy and science-fiction fans. Readers wanted it — they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

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• A membership card carrying the above design — personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic — will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

Secret of the Mountains

In a recent issue of WEIRD TALES Magazine a letter of mine was printed in the Weird Tales Club. I wrote this letter while in camp in the Superstition Mountains. I said that I was there in search of whatever had caused the disappearance of so many men who were hunting for the famous, and somewhat mythical, "Lost Dutchman's Mine." Soon after this issue of the magazine came out, I started hearing from readers of WEIRD TALES, asking me what I had discovered and suggesting I write another letter to the W. T. C., telling what I found. Here it is:

For some time I camped at that one spot but neither saw nor heard anything out of the usual. I decided to move camp. I knew of a very old rock cabin at the foot of what is known as "Sugarloaf" Mountain, about eight miles off the main highway and not too far from my camp. I had heard that this old cabin had the name of being haunted. I was out looking for "Ghosts" and the old cabin seemed to me to be the most likely place to find one.

The old wagon road came to an abrupt end where a bad washout put an end to my car's progress, but the old cabin was only about a mile farther on. So, leaving the car, I walked on across the rocky, cactus-covered desert, taking with me my rifle and a lunch.

Cattle men or sheep men must have kept the cabin in repair. I found it in pretty good shape and, best of all, there was a fine spring of good water about fifty yards below the cabin. A big

fireplace at one end of the room, a rough table and some empty boxes was all to be seen inside. It was then rather late in the afternoon. I made up my mind that if the ghost was to visit me, I would have to spend a night there, so I returned to the car, got a roll of blankets and some food and came back to the cabin. By the time I had gathered in some dry wood it was nearly dark.

After having eaten, I was sitting in front of the fire smoking my pipe and wondering if the stories I had heard were just "another ghost story." Nine o'clock came, and I had about made up my mind to go to bed when I thought I heard someone calling, or singing, down near the spring. I went to the door and listened, and the sound came again, but I could not be sure if it was made by a human voice or a coyote. I called out, but got no answer. There was no moon that night, but the stars made visibility fairly good. I walked down to the spring, but could see no one, so returned to the cabin. I was about to enter the doorway when the voice came again, and this time it seemed to come from out in front and about a hundred yards away.

I knew now that this was not a coyote, but a human, and a woman's voice at that! But if there were words being spoken they must have been in very old Spanish. I can speak Mexican pretty well, but I could not understand what was said. I could see no one. I walked out toward the spot from whence the voice seemed to be coming, and called a number of times. And each time the voice answered, but still I could not understand what was being said.

Finally the voice came no more and, though I stayed out for some time looking and calling, I got no more response, so finally gave it up and returned to the cabin and went to bed. In the morning I looked everywhere for tracks, but found none except my own.

Not long after I had returned home I was in Payson one day and ran into an old fellow who has been in this part of the country for the past fifty years. We got to talking about the Superstition Mounts and I asked this old desert-rat if he knew anything about the cabin at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain. He said he had heard the story of the ghost that haunts the place.

It seems that some four hundred years ago at the time Cortez was in what is now Old Mexico, a young man and his little daughter became lost and wandered around for a long time in the Superstitions. Here the man, a Spaniard, built a rock cabin near a good spring of water. He and his daughter resided there for some time, making friends with the Indians. Then one day the man left to go hunting. He never returned. His daughter, by that time a young woman, spent nearly all her time in looking for her father, finally went mad and died. The Indians say it is her earth-bound spirit that now haunts the old cabin at the foot of Sugarloaf Mountain.

Bert A. Slater.

Box 28, Payson, Arizona.

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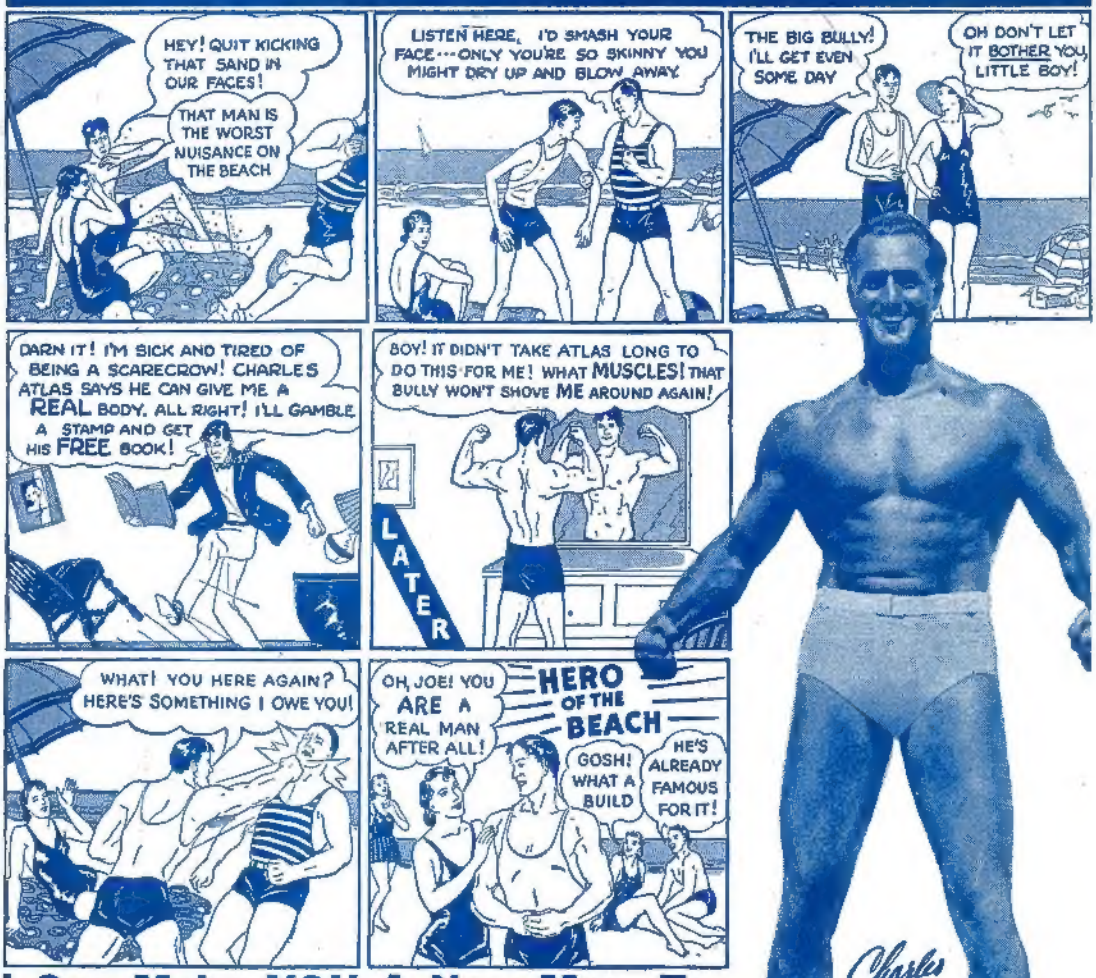

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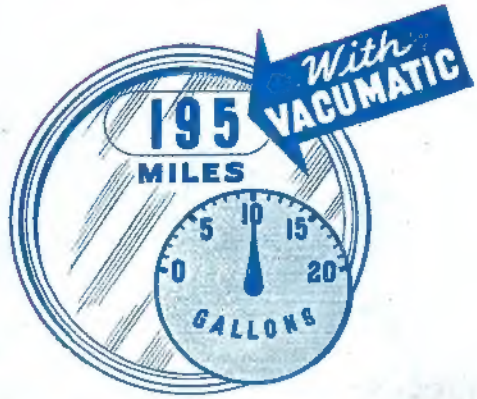

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